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Of him hay in me so fressh lyflynesse
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Of his psone ꝫ haue heere his lyknesse
Do make to yis ende in sothfastnesse
Yat yei yt haue of him left yought ꝫ mynde
By yis peynture may ageyn him fynde

The ymages yt in ye chirche been
Maken folk yenke on god ꝫ on his seyntes
Whan ye ymages yei be holden ꝫ seen
Were oft unsyte of hem cansith restreyntes
Of youghtes gode whan a ying depeynt is
Or entailed if men take of it heede
Thoght of ye lyknesse it wil in hym brede

PORTRAIT OF CHAUCER

PAINTED BY ORDER OF HIS PUPIL THOMAS HOCCLEVE, IN A COPY OF THE LATTER'S "REGEMENT OF PRINCES." THE HAIR AND BEARD ARE GREY, THE EYES HAZEL: HE HAS A ROSARY IN HIS LEFT HAND AND A BLACK PENCASE OR PENKNIFE HANGS FROM HIS NECK

CHAUCER AND HIS ENGLAND

BY

G. G. COULTON, M.A., CAMB.

HON. D. LITT., DURHAM
FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE
AND UNIVERSITY LECTURER IN ENGLISH

WITH TWENTY-THREE ILLUSTRATIONS

THIRD EDITION

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

NO book of this size can pretend to treat exhaustively of all that concerns Chaucer and his England; but the Author's main aim has been to supply an informal historical commentary on the poet's works. He has not hesitated, in a book intended for the general public, to modernize Chaucer's spelling, or even on rare occasions to change a word.

His best acknowledgments are due to those who have laboured so fruitfully during the last fifty years in publishing Chaucerian and other original documents of the later Middle Ages; more especially to Dr. F. J. Furnivall, the indefatigable founder of the Chaucer Society and the Early English Text Society; to Professor W. W. Skeat, whose ungrudging generosity in private help is necessarily known only to a small percentage of those who have been aided by his printed works; to Dr. R. R. Sharpe, archivist of the London Guildhall; to Prebendary F. C. Hingeston-Randolph and other editors of Episcopal Registers; to Messrs. W. Hudson and Walter Rye for their contributions to Norfolk history; and to Mr. V. B. Redstone's researches in Chaucerian genealogy. His proofs have enjoyed the great advantage of revision by Dr. Furnivall, who has made many valuable suggestions and corrections, but who is in no way responsible for other possible errors or omissions. The many debts to other writers are, it is hoped, duly acknowledged in their places; but the Author must here confess himself specially beholden to the writings of M. Jusserand, whose rare

sympathy and insight are combined with an equal charm of exposition.

He has also to thank Dr. F. J. Furnivall, Messrs. E. Kelsey and H. R. Browne of Eastbourne, and the Librarian of Uppingham School, for kind permission to reproduce seven of the illustrations; also the Editor of the *Home and Counties Magazine* for similar courtesy with regard to the plan of Chaucer's Aldgate included in a 16th-century survey published for the first time in that magazine (vol. i. p. 50).

EASTBOURNE

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

WHILE correcting for this Second Edition a few obscure sentences or too unqualified statements which I have to thank my reviewers for noting, I must also, in the light of more far-reaching criticisms, explain my main purpose more clearly. This is hardly the place to argue with a critic who brands me with anti-clericalism for emphasizing essential facts too often distorted or ignored by clerical historians, or who laments my imperfect artistic sense because I abstain from summarizing, for the hundredth time, the judgments of Ruskin and Morris, thinking it more useful to qualify than to repeat their well-known words, and holding with them that life is more than art. But Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in a generous review, has given such brilliant expression to more serious objections which I had already felt in the air, that I welcome this opportunity of meeting them.* He points out—and I am grateful to him as the first of my reviewers who has put this into words—that "every criticism of the fourteenth century ought to be also a criticism of the twentieth." He contends, however, that my favourable conclusions encourage modern pharisaism, and are in fact too indulgent to our own century.

The first I entirely deny, except so far as all consciousness of improvement must carry with it a corresponding temptation to pride. There is no more essential pharisaism in thanking God that our lot has been cast in this and no earlier age, than in the memor-

* *Daily News*, Oct. 16th, 1908.

able, *There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford!* It is simply to recognize that the world is not an over-ripe apple rotting to its fall, but a living organism, part and parcel of an infinitely marvellous universe, and most marvellous itself in its eternal youth. To emphasize the superiority of our century is to boast not our own righteousness, but the righteous and enduring work of eighteen honest generations—work which we in our turn must strenuously urge forward, or be branded as sluggards and cowards. Christ blamed the Pharisee not for presuming to make true comparisons, but for ignoring inconvenient facts. Mr. Chesterton, however, assures me that I do ignore the world in which I live. If so, it is certainly not for want of knocking about in it during the past fifty years; but I assumed in my readers some knowledge of General Booth's and Mr. Rowntree's revelations; nor was it my business to supplement these from personal experiences among colliers in South Wales, and refugee Jews in Whitechapel. In comparing modern heroes with their medieval forefathers I take account of backstairs gossip in both cases, though I do not always quote it. Mr. Chesterton makes the common but fatal mistake of supposing that, because medieval chroniclers tell us very queer things, they therefore tell us all.* The fallacy is specious, but so acute a critic might well have remembered Lady Mary Wortley Montague's famous *Ah! si vous pouviez voir mes pieds!* Siméon Luce, who knew Froissart's text and contemporary official documents probably better than any man before or since, and who certainly did not undervalue medieval civilization, was yet constrained to point out how dark a side there is behind the chronicler's revelations. †

* "In short, the other great merit of the Middle Ages, as compared with to-day, is that its chroniclers had a habit of telling the truth; and that (like all really truthful men) they thought telling 'the whole truth' more important even than telling 'nothing but the truth.'"

† *Hist. de Bertrand Du Guesclin*, 1882, p. 139. Luce ends, "Voilà le

Again, Mr. Chesterton so completely misunderstands an expression of mine on p. 258 that I fear it may have misled other readers. I never dreamed of saying that the modern tramp does not envy, or ought not to envy, the millionaire: I simply doubt whether it is possible to envy him appreciably more than the medieval poor envied an upstart merchant; a man who had more ready money than any duke, and probably wore a duke's ransom visibly on his person. To accept Mr. Chesterton's own illustration and press it to its logical conclusion, I should say that if one man were "putting away pâté-de-foie-gras and champagne" on a raft filled with starving castaways, while another man enjoyed beefsteak and porter under similar circumstances, it is scarcely possible in human nature that the one should excite more envy than the other. If the modern poor are more discontented than their fathers, this is generally not because they are worse off, but because they have already enjoyed a real improvement and therefore struggle, naturally enough, for more.

Finally, Mr. Chesterton presses upon me, in connexion with p. 256, an argument which might seem mere paradox to any one who could believe him capable of letting off such dangerous fireworks. "One of the sins of our time is that the classes have been sundered by *something worse than hatred*—shyness, which is a shameful fear." These words which I have italicized are so essential to his contention, and yet seem to me to falsify so fatally a very true sentence, that I venture to ask seriously (even though he may smile at my naïveté in taking him so literally): Is it possible in human nature to pass from open hate to sincere love without a long intervening period of shyness? "Chaucer's Knight talks and laughs with every class in England, not only without embarrassment but without condescension, as if it were quite natural that they should mix. A modern

vilain revers de cette chevalerie affolée de luxe, de tournois, de parade dont Froissart n'a voulu voir que les prouesses et les élégances."

gentleman would feel as a modern gentleman feels alone with a housemaid." This is only an infinitely wittier statement of a truth which I had tried to express elsewhere; but there is a whole world between this and the conclusions Mr. Chesterton would draw from it. If, on the whole, mankind has gone forward in the last five hundred years—and it is strange that the men who claim to speak for Christendom should seem to doubt most desperately of this world which Christ died to save—if, on the whole we have gone forward, then we can afford to be less impatient of our own very imperfect age, remembering that the Apostle collocates *patience* with *perfect work*. Pending the discovery of a North-West Passage to the abolition of class distinctions and poverty, it really does seem worth while to point out that the problems which we blame each successive generation for not solving have in fact become a few degrees less hopeless since the days of "Merrie England;" and that we may truly apply to different generations what Professor James' wise carpenter said about man and man: *there's very little difference between one and another; but that little difference is very important.* It is probable that, in condemning our modern shyness as worse than the old hate, Mr. Chesterton only means that the former is more trying to the temper. This may well be: shyness is indeed the very devil; but *courage, l'ami, le diable est mort!* and if liberty and equality are indeed growing, then true fraternity cannot fail to grow with them. Let us therefore possess our souls, even though the modern Marquis of Carabas may refuse to rub shoulders with us on a Canterbury Pilgrimage, fearing lest this condescension might encourage us to beg for a day among his pheasants. Sufficient to the day is the good thereof; it is something that we may now drive the peer's pigeons from our crops without desperate risk of life or limb; or that he and his foresters are no longer tempted to flesh their arrows in our quivering bodies. There is much sound philosophy in

Figaro's *je me crus trop heureux d'en être oublié; persuadé qu'un grand nous fait assez de bien, quand il ne nous fait pas de mal.*

I am told that some readers have been puzzled by the frequent marginal notes in square brackets (as on p. 37). These are added to explain the obsolete words in certain quotations: *e.g. went = glade; fele = many*, etc., etc.

Two important references have come to hand too late for insertion in the body of this Second Edition.

(1) The reader who wishes to follow all that is known about Chaucer's ancestry and relations must now refer to the exhaustive and most interesting article on pp. 243, foll., of Mr. V. B. Redstone's "Memorials of Old Suffolk," just published by Bemrose & Son.

(2) Nicolas held that the town of "Retters," before which Chaucer testified to having seen Sir Richard Scrope during his unlucky campaign (see p. 26 of this book), was Rétiers in Brittany; but modern biographers have preferred to identify it with Réthel in the Ardennes. The truth of this last conjecture is put beyond doubt by the account of that campaign in Sir Thomas Gray's *Scalacronica* (Maitland Club, 1836, p. 188), which mentions that the Black Prince's column was beaten off from "Retieris," but forced a passage at Château-Porcien, which is in fact close by Réthel. Chaucer therefore served in the Black Prince's column.

EASTBOURNE

NOTE TO THE THIRD EDITION

MOST authors, looking back upon their work of thirteen years ago, would be glad to find time for re-writing some of the pages. But fresh work is nearly always inexorably urgent; and, in this case, the author has contented himself with silently correcting a few errors which time had brought to light.

GT. SHELFORD, CAMBS.
Sept., 1921

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CHAUCER AND HIS ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

YOUNG ENGLAND

"O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames!"

FEW men could lay better claim than Chaucer to this happy accident of birth with which Matthew Arnold endows his Scholar Gipsy, if we refrain from pressing too literally the poet's fancy of a Golden Age. Chaucer's times seemed sordid enough to many good and great men who lived in them; but few ages of the world have been better suited to nourish such a genius, or can afford a more delightful travelling-ground for us of the 20th century. There is indeed a glory over the distant past which is (in spite of the paradox) scarcely less real for being to a great extent imaginary; scarcely less true because it owes so much to the beholder's eye. It is like the subtle charm we feel every time we set foot afresh on a foreign shore. It is just because we should never dream of choosing France or Germany for our home that we love them so much for our holidays; it is just because we are so deeply rooted in our own age that we find so much pleasure and profit in the past, where we may build for ourselves a new heaven and a new earth out of the wreck of a vanished world. The very things which would oppress us out of all proportion as present-day realities dwindle to even less than their real significance in the long perspective of history.

All the oppressions that were then done under the sun, and the tears of such as were oppressed, show very small in the sum-total of things; the ancient tale of wrong has little meaning to us who repose so far above it all; the real landmarks are the great men who for a moment moulded the world to their own will, or those still greater who kept themselves altogether unspotted from it. Human nature gives the lie direct to Mark Antony's bitter rhetoric: it is rather the good that lives after a man, and the evil that is oft interred with his bones. The balance may not be very heavy, but it is on the right side; man's insatiable curiosity about his fellow-men is as natural as his appetite for food, which may on the whole be trusted to refuse the evil and choose the good; and, in both cases, his taste is, within obvious limits, a true guide. It is a healthy instinct which prompts us to dwell on the beauties of an ancient timber-built house, or on the gorgeous pageantry of the Middle Ages, without a too curious scrutiny of what may lie under the surface; and at this distance the 14th century stands out to the modern eye with a clearness and brilliancy which few men can see in their own age, or even in that immediate past which must always be partially dimmed with the dust of present-day conflicts. Those who were separated by only a few generations from the Middle Ages could seldom judge them with sufficient sympathy. Even two hundred years ago, most Englishmen thought of that time as a great forest from which we had not long emerged; they looked back and saw it in imagination as Dante saw the dark wood of his own wanderings—bitter as death, cruel as the perilous sea from which a spent swimmer has just struggled out upon the shore. Then, with Goethe and Scott, came the Romantic Revival; and these men showed us the Middle Ages peopled with living creatures—beasts of prey, indeed, in very many cases, but always bright and swift and attractive, as wild beasts are in comparison with the

commonplace stock of our fields and farmyards—bright in themselves, and heightened in colour by the artificial brilliancy which perspective gives to all that we see through the wrong end of a telescope. Since then men have turned the other end of the telescope on medieval society, and now, in due course, the microscope, with many curious results. But it is always good to balance our too detailed impressions with a general survey, and to take a brief holiday by quitting the world in which our own daily work has to be done, and entering another peopled by a race of men so unlike the modern English, even amid all their general resemblance.

For the England of Edward III. was already, in its main national features, the England in which we live to-day. "In no country of Europe are the present-day institutions and manners and beliefs so directly derived from the social state of five centuries ago."* The year 1340, which saw the abolition of the law of Englishry, was very likely the exact year of Chaucer's birth; and from that time forward our legislation ceased to recognize any distinction of races: all natives of England were alike Englishmen. Sixteen years later it was first enacted that cases in the Sheriff's Courts of London should be pleaded in English; seven years later, again, this became in theory the language not only of the King's law courts, but also to some extent of Parliament; and Nicolas quotes an amusing instance of two ambassadors to France, a Knight and a Doctor of Laws, who confessed in 1404 "we are as ignorant of French as of Hebrew." The contemporary Trevisa apparently attributes this rapid breakdown to the Great Pestilence of 1349; but even before this the French language must have been in full decay among us, for at the Parliament

* See Jusserand, "Hist. Litt.," L. III., ch. i., and the Preface to his "Vie Nomade"; also chap. xix. of Prof. Tout's volume in the "Political Hist. of Engd." It is nearly one hundred and fifty years since Tyrwhitt showed, by abundant quotations, the stages by which English fought its way to final recognition as the national language.

which Edward III. called in 1337 to advise him about declaring war on France, the ambassador of Robert d'Artois took care to speak "in English, in order to be understanded of all folk, for a man ever knoweth better what he would say and propose in the language of his childhood than in any other." Later in the same year, in the famous statute which forbade all sports except the longbow, it was further ordained "that all lords, barons, knights, and honourable men of good towns should be careful and diligent to teach and instruct their children in the French tongue, whereby they might be the more skilful and practised in their wars."* But Acts of Parliament are not omnipotent even in the 20th century; and in the 14th they often represented rather pious aspirations than workaday facts. It was easier to foster a healthy pastime like archery than to enforce scholastic regulations which parents and masters were alike tempted to neglect; and certainly the French language lost ground very rapidly in the latter half of the century. In 1362 English superseded French as the spoken language of the law courts; next year the Chancellor opened Parliament in an English speech; and in 1385 Trevisa complained that boys at grammar-schools "know no more French than their left heel." The language lingered, of course. Chaucer's friend and contemporary, Gower, wrote as much in French as in English. French still kept the upper hand in Parliament till about fifty years after Chaucer's death, nor did the statutes cease altogether to be published in that language until the reign of Henry VIII. But though it was still the Court tongue in Chaucer's time, and though we do not know that Edward III. was capable of addressing his Commons in their native tongue, yet Henry IV. took care to claim the throne before Parliament in plain

* Froissart, ed. Luce, i., 359, 402. There was in 1444 a similar attempt to keep up Latin and French among the Benedictine monks, since from ignorance of one or the other language "they frequently fall into shame." Reynerus, "De Antiq. Benedict," p. 129.

English;* and even before that time French had already become an exotic, an artificial dialect needing hothouse culture—no longer French of Paris, but that of "Stratford attë Bowë."† The tongue sat ill on a nation that was already proud of its insularity and unity. Even while labouring to write in French, Gower dedicates his work to his country: "O gentile Engletere, a toi j'escrits." It is not the least of Chaucer's claims on our gratitude that, from the very first, he wrote for the English people in English—that is, in the mixed dialect of Anglo-Saxon and Norman-French which was habitually spoken in London by the upper middle classes of a mingled Norman and Teutonic population‡—and that in so doing he laid the foundations of a national literary language. Much, of course, still remained to be done. Caxton, in 1490, shows us how an Englishman might well be taken for a Frenchman outside his own country,§ as in modern Germany a foreigner who speaks fluently, however incorrectly, passes easily for a German of some remote and barbarous province. Indeed, English unity in Chaucer's time was in some ways as incomplete as that of the modern

* "He chalenged in Englyssh tunge" ("Chronicles of London," ed. Kingsford, p. 43, where the exact form of words used by Henry is recorded; cf. Dymock's challenge, ibid., p. 49).

† It is difficult to go altogether with Prof. Skeat in his repudiation of the sense commonly attached to this phrase (note on *Prologue*, 126). Chaucer seems to say that the Prioress (*a*) knew French, but (*b*) only French of Stratford, just as he explains that the parish clerk (*a*) could dance, but (*b*) only after the School of Oxenford. Chaucer could scarcely have claimed that the Norman-French of England was as pure as the French of Paris.

‡ For the most interesting account of this fusion, see Jusserand, "Hist. Litt.," p. 236. (Bk. III., ch. i.)

§ "English Garner," 15th century, ed. A. W. Pollard, p. 240; J. R. Green's "Short History," p. 291. "And one of them named Sheffield, a mercer, came into a house and asked for meat, and especially he asked after eggs; and the goodwife answered that she could speak no French, and the merchant was angry, for he also could speak no French, but would have had eggs, and she understood him not. And then at last another said, that he would have 'eyren'; then the goodwife said that she understood him well. Lo, what should a man in these days now write, eggs or eyren?"

German empire. Men would still go before bishops and magistrates to purge themselves by a solemn oath from the injurious suspicion of being Scots, and therefore enemies to the realm; and a couple of generations earlier the suspected Welshman had found himself under the same necessity. The articles of peace drawn up in 1274 at Oxford between the northern and Irish scholars "read like a treaty of peace between hostile nations rather than an act of University legislation"; and even at the end of Chaucer's life we may find royal letters "licensing John Russell, born in Ireland, to reside in England, notwithstanding the proclamation that all Irish-born were to go and stay in their own country." But the Oxford *Concordia* of 1274 was the last which recognized that division of students into "nations" which still remained so real at Paris and other continental universities; and though blood still reddened Oxford streets for a century longer in the ancient quarrel of north and south, yet the "great slaughter" of 1354 was entirely a town and gown affray.*

The foundations of modern England were laid by Edward I., who did more than any other king to create a national parliament, a national system of justice, and a national army.† Edward III., with far less creative power, but with equal energy and ambition, inherited the ripe fruits of his grandfather's policy, and raised England to a place in European politics which she had never reached before and was seldom to reach again. "That which touches all," said Edward I., "should be approved by all"; and, though continental sovereigns might use similar language as a subtle cloke for their arbitrary encroachments, in England the maxim had from the first a real meaning. The great barons—

* See the cases given in full by Thorold Rogers, "Oxford City Documents," pp. 168, 170, 173, and H. Rashdall's "Universities of Europe," ii., 363, 369, 403.

† See the articles by Prof. Maitland and Mr. A. L. Smith in vol. ii. of "Social England."

themselves steadily dwindling in feudal power — no longer sat alone in the King's councils; by their side sat country gentlemen and citizens elected to share in the responsibilities of government; and the clergy, but for their own persistent separatism, might have sent their chosen representatives to sit with the rest. Moreover, already in Chaucer's time we find precedents for the boldest demands of the Long Parliament. The Commons claimed, and for a time obtained, the control of taxation; and five of Richard II.'s ministers were condemned as traitors for counselling him to measures which Parliament branded as unconstitutional. Professor Maitland has well described the "omnicompetence" of Parliament at this time. Nothing human was alien to its sphere of activity, from the sale of herrings at Yarmouth fair and the fashion of citizens' girdles to those great constitutional questions which remained in dispute for three centuries longer, and were only settled at last by a civil war and a revolution.

Nor was the judicial system less truly national than the Parliament. Maitland has pointed out that the years 1272–1290 were more fruitful in epoch-making legislation than any other period of English history, except perhaps that which succeeded the Reform Bill of 1832. Chaucer, like ourselves, lived in an age which was consolidating the great achievements of two generations past, and looking forward to far-reaching social changes in the future. Already in his time the Roman Law was outlandish in England; our land laws were fixed in many principles which for centuries remained unquestioned, and which are often found to underlie even the present system. Already under Edward III., as for many centuries afterwards, men looked upon the main principles of English jurisprudence as settled for ever, and strove only by a series of ingenious accommodations to fit them in with the requirements of a changing world. The framework of the law courts, again, was roughly that of modern

England. The King's judges were no longer clerics, but laymen chosen from among the professional pleaders in the courts; and here again "one remarkable characteristic of our legal system is fixed."

In many other ways, too, the kingdom had outgrown its clerical tutelage. Learning and art had long since ceased to be predominantly monastic; for at least two centuries before Chaucer's birth they had left the protection of the cloister, and flourished far more luxuriantly in the great world than they ever could have done under strictly monastic conditions. True monasticism was predominantly puritan, and therefore unfavourable to free development in any direction but that of mystic contemplation; if the spirit of St. Bernard had lived among the Cistercians, the glories of Tintern and Rievaulx would have been impossible; and even our cathedrals and parish churches owed more of their beauties to laymen than to clerics. So also with our universities, which rose on the ruins of monastic learning; and in which, despite the fresh impetus received from the Friars, the lay spirit still grew rapidly under the shelter of the Church. In the 14th century, when Oxford could show such a roll of philosophers that "not all the other Nations and Universities of Europe between them could muster such a list," a growing proportion of these were not cloistered, but secular clergy. At no earlier time could these latter have shown three such Oxford doctors as Bradwardine, Richard of Armagh, and Wycliffe. The General Chapter of the Benedictines strove repeatedly, but in vain, to compel a reasonable proportion of monks to study at Oxford or Cambridge.* Before the end of Edward III.'s reign, the English Universities had become far more truly national than at any previous time; their training and aims were less definitely ecclesiastical, and their

* Cf. Reynerus, "De Antiq. Benedict," pp. 107, 136, *425*, *468*, 595. The pages in italics contain startling lists of defaulting abbeys and priories.

culture overflowed to laymen like Chaucer and Gower.* Moreover, the Inns of Court had become practically lay universities of law: and, quite apart from Wycliffism, there was a rapid growth not only of the non-clerical but even of anti-clerical spirit. Blow after blow was struck at Papal privileges by successive Parliaments in which the representatives of the lower clergy no longer sat. The Pope's demand for arrears of John's tribute from England was rejected so emphatically that it was never pressed again; Parliament repudiated Papal claims of presentation to vacant benefices, and forbade, under the severest penalties, all unlicensed appeals to Rome from English courts. It is true that our kings constantly gave way on these two last points, but only because it was easier to share the spoils by connivance with the Popes; and these statutes mark none the less an epoch in English history. In 1371, again, Edward III. assented to a petition from Parliament which pleaded "inasmuch as the government of the realm has long been in the hands of the men of Holy Church, who in no case can be brought to account for their acts, whereby great mischief has happened in times past and may happen in times to come, may it therefore please the king that laymen of his own realm be elected to replace them, and that none but laymen henceforth be chancellor, treasurer, barons of the exchequer, clerk of privy seal, or other great officers of the realm." Already the partial sequestration of the Alien Priories by the three Edwards, and the total suppression and spoliation of the Templars in 1312, had accustomed men's minds to schemes of wholesale disendowment which were advocated as earnestly by an anti-Lollard like Langland †

* See Gower's "Vox Clamantis," Bk. III., c. 28, for a description of the worldly aims of the 14th-century universities.

† It seems extremely probable, to say the least, that the poem of Piers Plowman was by more than one hand; but, in any case, the authors were contemporaries, and seem to have held very much the same views; so that it is still possible for most purposes of historical argument to quote the poem under the traditional name of Langland.

as by Wycliffe himself; and indeed this writer, the most religious among the three principal poets of that age, was also the most anticlerical. In Edward III.'s reign the Reformation was already definitely in sight.

In short, Chaucer's lot was cast in an epoch-making age. England's claim to the lordship of the seas was at least a century old; but Sluys, our first decisive maritime victory, "the Trafalgar of the Middle Ages," was won in the same year in which the poet was probably born; six years later, Calais became in a sense our first colony; and it was noted even in those days that the Englishman prospered still more abroad than at home. Never before or since have English armies been so frequently and so uniformly victorious as during the first thirty years of Chaucer's life; seldom have our commerce and our liberties developed more rapidly; and if the disasters which he saw were no less strange, these also helped to ripen his many-sided genius. The Great Pestilence of 1349, more terrible than any other recorded in history; the first pitched battle between Labour and Capital in 1381; the first formal deposition of an English King in 1327, to be repeated still more solemnly in 1399; all these must have affected the poet almost as deeply as they affected the State, notwithstanding the persistency with which he generally looks upon the brighter side. Professor Raleigh has wittily applied to him the confession of Dr. Johnson's friend, "I have tried in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in." It is difficult, however, not to surmise a great deal of more or less unwilling philosophy beneath Chaucer's delightful flow of good-humour. His subtle ironies may tell as plain a tale as other men's open complaints; and sometimes he hastens to laugh where we might suspect a rising lump in his throat. But the laugh is there, or at least the easy, good-natured smile. Where Gower sees an England more hopelessly given over to the Devil than even in Carlyle's most

dyspeptic nightmares—where the robuster Langland sees an impending religious Armageddon, and the honest soul's pilgrimage from the City of Destruction towards a New Jerusalem rather hoped for than seen even by the eye of faith—there Chaucer, with incurable optimism, sees chiefly a Merry England to which the horrors of the Hundred Years' War and the Black Death and Tyler's revolt are but a foil. Like many others in the Middle Ages, he seems convinced of the peculiar instability of the English character. He knew that he was living—as all generations are more or less conscious of living—in an uncomfortable borderland between that which once was, but can be no longer, and that which shall be, but cannot yet come to pass; yet all these changes supplied the artist with that variety of colour and form which he needed; and the man seems to have gone through life in the tranquil conviction that this was a pleasant world, and his own land a particularly privileged spot. The England of Chaucer is that of which one of his most noted predecessors wrote, "England is a strong land and a sturdy, and the plenteousest corner of the world, so rich a land that unneth it needeth help of any land, and every other land needeth help of England. England is full of mirth and of game, and men oft times able to mirth and game, free men of heart and with tongue, but the hand is more better and more free than the tongue." *

* Bartholomæus Anglicus (Steele, "Mediæval Lore," 1905), p. 86.

CHAPTER II

BOYHOOD AND YOUTH

"Jeunes amours, si vite épanouies,
Vous êtes l'aube et le matin du cœur.
Charmez l'enfant, extases inouïes
Et, quand le soir vient avec la douleur,
Charmez encor nos âmes éblouies,
Jeunes amours, si vite évanouies!"

VICTOR HUGO

THE name *Chaucer* was in some cases a corruption of *chauffecire, i.e.* "chafewax," or clerk in the Chancery, whose duty it was to help in the elaborate operation of sealing royal documents.* But Mr. V. B. Redstone seems to have shown conclusively that the poet's ancestors were *chaussiers*, or makers of long hose, and that they combined this business with other more or less extensive mercantile operations, especially as vintners. The family, like others in the wine trade, may well have come originally from Gascony; but in the 13th and 14th centuries it seems to have thriven mainly in London and East Anglia, and recent research has definitely traced the poet's immediate ancestry to Ipswich.† His grandfather, Robert Malyn, surnamed le Chaucer, came from the Suffolk village

* Besant quotes accounts recording (*inter alia*) a gift of wine to the "Chaucer" on the occasion of a mayoral procession, but apparently without realizing its significance. ("Mediæval London," i., 303.)

† Mr. V. B. Redstone, in *Athenæum*, No. 4087, p. 233, and *East Anglian Daily Times*, April 8, 1908, p. 5, col. 7. It is not my aim, in this chapter, to trouble the reader with discussions of doubtful points, but rather to present what is certainly known, or may safely be inferred about Chaucer's life.

of Dennington, and set up a tavern in Ipswich. Robert left a child named John, who was forcibly abducted one night in 1324 by Geoffrey Stace, apparently his uncle. When Stace "stole and took away by force and arms—viz. swords, bows, and arrows—the said John," his object was to settle possible difficulties of succession to a certain estate by forcing the boy to marry Joan de Westhale; and he pleaded in his justification the custom of Ipswich, by which "an heir became of full age at the end of his twelfth year, if he knew how to reckon and measure"; * but he was very heavily fined for his breach of the peace. We learn from the pleadings in this case that John Chaucer was still unmarried in 1328; that he lived in London with his stepfather, namesake, and fellow-vintner, Richard Chaucer, and that his patrimony was very small. Richard, dying twenty-one years later, left his house and his tavern to the Church; but he had very likely given his stepson substantial help during his lifetime. In any case, John must have thriven rapidly, for we find him, in 1338, at the age of twenty-six or thereabouts, among the distinguished company which followed Edward III. on his journey up the Rhine to negociate an alliance with the Emperor Louis IV. The Royal Wardrobe Books give many interesting detail of this journey.† Queen Philippa accompanied the King half-way across Brabant, and then returned to Antwerp, where she gave birth to Lionel of Clarence, the poet's first master. Among the party were also several of the household of the Earl of Derby, father-in-law to that John of Gaunt with whom Geoffrey Chaucer's fortunes were to be closely bound. The travellers had started from Antwerp on Sunday, August 16; and on the following Sunday a long day's journey

* At Wycombe, too, "every citizen from twelve years old could serve on juries for the town business." Mrs. Green, "Town Life," i., 184. I shall have occasion in the next chapter to note how early men began life in those days.

† Pauli, "Pictures of Old England," chap. v.

brought them within sight of the colossal choir which, until sixty years ago, was almost all that existed of Cologne Cathedral. Here the King gave liberally to the building fund; and here John Chaucer probably stayed behind, since he and his fellow-citizens had come to promote closer commercial relations between the Rhine cities and London. The King was towed up the Rhine by sixty-two boatmen, sat in the Diet at Coblenz as Vicar Imperial, formed a seven years' alliance with the Emperor, and sent on his five-year-old daughter Joan to Munich, where she waited many months vainly, but probably without impatience, for the young Duke of Austria, who was at present bespoken for another, but who finally turned elsewhere. Meanwhile Edward came back to Bonn, where he had to pay the equivalent of about £330 modern money for damage done in a quarrel between the citizens and those of his suite whom he had left behind—John Chaucer probably included. The Queen met the party again in Brabant, and they returned to Antwerp after a journey of exactly four weeks. We meet with several further allusions to John Chaucer among the London city records. It was very likely he who, in July, 1349, brought a valuable present from the Bishop of Salisbury to Queen Philippa at Devizes, at the time when the ravages of the Black Death in London supply a very probable reason for his absence from town, so that he might well have had his wife and son with him on this occasion. Certainly it was he who, with fourteen other principal vintners of the city, assented in 1342 to an ordinance providing that "no taverner should mix putrid and corrupt wine with wine that is good and pure, or should forbid that, when any company is drinking wine in his tavern, one of them, for himself and the rest of the company, shall enter the cellar where the tuns or pipes are then lying, and see that the measures or vessels into which the wine is poured are quite empty and clean within; and in like manner, from what tun or what pipe the wine is so

LONDON BRIDGE, ETC., IN THE 16TH CENTURY

(FROM VERTUE'S ENGRAVING OF AGGAS'S MAP)

THE MOUTH OF THE WALBROOK MAY BE SEEN BETWEEN TWO HOUSES JUST ABOVE THE RIGHT-HAND COW. THAMES STREET IS THE LONG STREET PARALLEL TO THE RIVER

drawn." This salutary ordinance was set at nought afterwards, as it had been before; but this and other records bear witness to John Chaucer's standing in his profession.

Geoffrey Chaucer was probably born about the year 1340, in his father's London dwelling, which is described in a legal document of the time as "a certain tenement situate in the parish of St. Martin at Vintry, between the tenement of William le Gauger on the east and that which once belonged to John le Mazelyner on the west: and it extendeth in length from the King's highway of Thames Street southwards, unto the water of Walbrook northwards."* The Water of Walbrook rose in the northern heights of Hampstead and Highbury, spread with others into the swamp of Moorfields, divided the city roughly into two halves, and discharged its sluggish waters into the Thames about where Cannon Street station now stands. Similar streams, or "fleets," creeping between overhanging houses, are still frequent enough in little continental towns, and survive here and there even in England.† Stow, writing in Queen Elizabeth's reign, describes how the lower part of Walbrook was bricked over in 1462, leaving it still "a fair brook of sweet water" in its upper course; and he takes pains to assure us that it was not really called after Galus, "a Roman captain slain by Asclepiodatus, and thrown therein, as some have fabled." In Chaucer's time it ran openly through the wall between Moorgate and Bishopsgate, washed St. Margaret's, Lothbury, and ran under

* "Life Records," iv., 232. The industry of Mr. Walter Rye has collected a large number of documentary notices which establish a probable connection of some kind between Chaucer and Norfolk; but the evidence seems insufficient as yet to prove Mr. Rye's thesis that the poet was born at Lynn; and in default of such definite evidence, it is safer to presume that he was born in the Thames Street house. (*Athenæum*, March 7, 1908; cf. "Life Records," iii., 131.)

† At Rouen, Caudebec, and Gisors, for instance, are very exact counterparts of the Walbrook, except that the overhanging houses are a century or two later, and proportionately larger.

the kitchen of Grocer's Hall, and again under St. Mildred's church; "from thence through Bucklersbury, by one great house built of stone and timber called the Old Barge, because barges out of the river of Thames were rowed so far into this brook, on the back side of the houses in Walbrook Street." In this last statement, however, Stow himself had probably built too rashly upon a mere name; for no barges can have come any distance up the stream for centuries before its final bricking up. The mass of miscellaneous documents preserved at the Guildhall, from which so much can be done to reconstitute medieval London, give us a most unflattering picture of the Walbrook. From 1278 to 1415 we find it periodically "stopped up by divers filth and dung thrown therein by persons who have houses along the said course, to the great nuisance and damage of all the city." The "King's highway of Thames Street," though one of the chief arteries of the city, cannot have been very spacious in these days, when even Cheapside was only just wide enough to allow two chariots to pass each other; and when Chaucer became his own master he doubtless did well to live in hired houses over the gate of Aldgate or in the Abbey garden of Westminster, and sell the paternal dwelling to a fellow-citizen who was presumably of tougher fibre than himself. Yet, in spite of Walbrook and those riverside lanes which Dr. Creighton surmises to have been the least sanitary spots of medieval London, the Vintry was far from being one of the worst quarters of the town. On the contrary, it was rather select, as befitted the "Merchant Vintners of Gascoyne," many of whom were mayors of the city; and Stow's survey records many conspicuous buildings in this ward. First, the headquarters of the wine trade, "a large house built of stone and timber, with vaults for the storage of wines, and is called the Vintry. There dwelt John Gisers, vintner, mayor of London and constable of the town." Here also "Henry Picard, vintner (mayor, 1357), in the year 1363, did in one day sumptuously feast Edward III.,

King of England, John, King of France, David, King of Scots, the King of Cyprus (then all in England), Edward, Prince of Wales, with many other noblemen, and after kept his hall for all comers that were willing to play at dice and hazard. The Lady Margaret, his wife, kept her chamber to the same effect." Picard, as Mr. Rye points out, was one of John Chaucer's fellow-vintners on Edward III.'s Rhine journey in 1338.* Then there were the Vintner's Hall and almshouses, which were built in Chaucer's lifetime; the three Guild Halls of the Cutlers, Plumbers, and Glaziers; the town mansions of the Earls of Worcester and Ormond, and the great house of the Ypres family, at which John of Gaunt was dining in 1377 when a knight burst in with news that London was up in arms against him, "and unless he took great heed, that day would be his last. With which words the duke leapt so hastily from his oysters that he hurt both his legs against the form. Wine was offered, but he could not drink for haste, and so fled with his fellow Henry Percy out at a back gate, and entering the Thames, never stayed rowing until they came to a house near the manor of Kennington, where at that time the princess [of Wales] lay with Richard the young prince, before whom he made his complaint."

Of Chaucer's childhood we have no direct record. No doubt he played with other boys at forbidden games of ball in the narrow streets, to the serious risk of other people's windows or limbs;† no doubt he brought his cock to fight in school, under magisterial supervision, on Shrove Tuesday, and played in the fields outside the walls at the still rougher game of football, or at "leaping, dancing, shooting, wrestling, and casting the stone." In winter, when the great

* The illustration on page 177 represents a similar royal banquet—the celebrated Peacock Feast of Lynn. Robert Braunche, mayor, entertained Edward there *circa* 1350, and caused the event to be immortalized on his funeral monument. Henry Picard himself was King's Butler at Lynn in 1350 (Rye, *l. c.*).

† Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, an. 1410; Rashdall, *l. c.* II. 670.

swamp of Moorfields was frozen, he would be sure to flock out with the rest to "play upon the ice; some, striding as wide as they may, do slide swiftly; others make themselves seats of ice, as great as millstones; one sits down, many hand in hand to draw him, and one slipping on a sudden, all fall together; some tie

MEDIEVAL COCK-FIGHTING, ACTUAL AND METAPHORICAL
(From Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes")

bones to their feet and under their heels, and shoving themselves by a little piked staff, do slide as swiftly as a bird flieth in the air, or an arrow out of a cross-bow. Sometime two run together with poles, and hitting one the other, either one or both do fall, not without hurt; some break their arms, some their legs, but youth desirous of glory in this sort exerciseth

itself against the time of war."* In spring he would watch the orchards of Southwark put on their fresh leaves and blossoms, and walk abroad with his father in the evening to the pleasant little village of Holborn; but he had a perennial source of amusement nearer home than this. Nearly all the old wall along the Thames had already been broken down, as the city had grown in population and security, while more ships came daily to unload their cargoes at the wharves. Here and there stood mighty survivals of the old river-side fortifications: Montfitchet's Tower flanking the walls up-stream and the Tower of London down-stream; and between them, close by Chaucer's own home, the "Tower Royal," in which the Queen Dowager found safety during Wat Tyler's revolt. But the Thames itself was now bordered by an almost continuous line of open quays, among the busiest of which were those of Vintry ward, "where the merchants of Bordeaux craned their wines out of lighters and other vessels," and finally built their vaulted warehouses so thickly as to crowd out the cooks' shops; "for Fitzstephen, in the reign of Henry II., writeth, that upon the river's side, between the wine in ships and the wine to be sold in Taverns, was a common cookery or cooks' row." Here, then, Chaucer would loiter to study the natural history of the English shipman, full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard. Here he would see not only native craft from "far by west," but broad-sailed vessels from every country of Europe, with cargoes as various as their nationalities. Not a stone's throw from his father's house stood the great fortified hall and wharf of the Hanse merchants, the Easterlings who gave their name to our standard coinage, and whose London premises remained the property of Lübeck, Hamburg, and Bremen until 1853.† Chief among the Easterlings at this time were the

* Fitzstephen, in Stow, p. 119.

† See "The Hanseatic Steelyard," in Pauli's "Pictures," chap. vi.

Cologne merchants, with whom John Chaucer had specially close relations; so that the little Geoffrey must often have trotted in with his father to see the vines and fruit-trees with which these thrifty Germans had laid out a plot of make-believe Rhineland beside far-off Thames shore. Often must he have wondered at the half-monastic, half-military discipline which these knights of commerce kept inside their high stone walls, and sat down to nibble at his share of "a Dutch bun and a keg of sturgeon," or dipped his childish lips in the paternal flagon of Rhenish. Meanwhile he went to school, since his writings show a very considerable amount of learning for a layman of his time. French he would pick up easily enough among this colony of "Merchant Vintners of Gascoyne"; and for Latin there were at least three grammar schools attached to different churches in London, of which St. Paul's lay nearest to Chaucer's home. But he probably began first with one of the many clerks in lower orders, who, all through the Middle Ages, eked out their scanty income by teaching boys and girls to read; and here we may remember what a contemporary man of letters tells us of his own childhood in a great merchant city. "When they put me to school," writes Froissart, "there were little girls who were young in my days, and I, who was a little boy, would serve them with pins, or with an apple or a pear, or a plain glass ring; and in truth methought it great prowess to win their grace . . . and then would I say to myself, 'When will the hour strike for me, that I shall be able to love in earnest?' . . . When I was grown a little wiser, it behoved me to be more obedient; for they made me learn Latin, and if I varied in repeating my lessons, they gave me the rod. . . . I could not be at rest; I was beaten, and I beat in turn; then was I in such disarray that ofttimes I came home with torn clothes, when I was chidden and beaten again; but all their pains were utterly lost, for I took no heed thereof. When I saw my comrades pass

down the street in front, I soon found an excuse to go and tumble with them again."* Is not childhood essentially the same in all countries and in all ages?

The first certain glimpse we get of the future poet is at the age of seventeen or eighteen. A manuscript of the British Museum containing poems by Chaucer's contemporaries, Lydgate and Hoccleve, needed rebinding; and the old binding was found, as often, to have been strengthened with two sheets of parchment pasted inside the covers. These sheets, religiously preserved, in accordance with the traditions of the Museum, were found to contain household accounts of the Countess of Ulster, wife to that Prince Lionel who had been born so near to the time of John Chaucer's continental journey, and who was therefore two or three years older than the poet. Among the items were found records of clothes given to different members of the household for Easter, 1357; and low down on the list comes Geoffrey Chaucer, who received a short cloak, a pair of tight breeches in red and black, and shoes. In these red-and-black hosen the poet comes for the first time into full light on the stage of history. Two other trifling payments to him are recorded later on; but the chief interest of the remaining accounts lies in the light they throw on the Countess's movements. We see that she travelled much and was present at several great Court festivities; and we have every right to assume that Chaucer in her train had an equally varied experience. "We may catch glimpses of Chaucer in London, at Windsor, at the feast of St. George, held there with great pomp in connection with the newly founded Order of the Garter, again in London, then at Woodstock, at the celebration of the feast at Pentecost, at Doncaster, at Hatfield in Yorkshire, where he spends Christmas, again at Windsor, in Anglesey (August, 1358), at Liverpool, at the funeral of Queen Isabella

* "Œuvres," ed. Buchon, vol. iii., pp. 479 ff.; cf. Lydgate's account of his own schooldays, in "Babees Book," E.E.T.S., p. xliii.

at the Grey Friars Church, London (November 27th, 1358), at Reading, again in London, visiting the lions in the Tower." *

Lionel himself, the romance of whose too brief life was said to have begun even before his birth,† was the tallest and handsomest of all the King's sons. As the chronicler Hardyng says—

> "In all the world was then no prince hym like,
> Of his stature and of all semelynesse
> Above all men within his hole kyngrike
> By the shulders he might be seen doutlesse,
> [And] as a mayde in halle of gentilnesse."

His second marriage and tragic death, not without suspicion of poison, may be found written in Froissart under the year 1368; but as yet there was no shadow over his life, and in 1357 there can have been few gayer Courts for a young poet than this, to which there came, at the end of the year, among other great folk, the great prince John of Gaunt, who was afterwards to be Chaucer's and Wycliffe's best patron. For all John Chaucer's favour with the King, the vintner's son could never have found a place in this great society without brilliant qualities of his own. We must think of him like his own squire—singing, fluting, and dancing, fresh as the month of May; already a poet, and warbling his love-songs like the nightingale while staider folk snored in their beds. His earliest poems refer to an unrequited passion, not so much natural as positively inevitable under those conditions. Within the narrow compass of

* Prof. Hales, in "Dict. Nat. Biog."

† See the Queen's vow before the outbreak of the Hundred Years, War, in Wright's "Political Poems," R.S., p. 23.

> "Alors dit la reine: 'Je sais bien que piecha [il y a longtemps
> Que suis grosse d'enfant, que mon corps sentit la,
> Encore n'a t-il guère qu'en mon corps se tourna;
> Et je voue et promets à Dieu qui me créa. . . .
> Que jamais fruit de moi de mon corps n'istera, [sortira
> Si m'en aurez menée au pays par delà.'"

a medieval castle, daily intercourse was proportionately closer, as differences of rank were more indelible than they are nowadays; and in a society where neither could seriously dream of marriage, Kate the Queen might listen all the more complacently to the page's love-carol as he crumbled the hounds their messes. The desire of the moth for the star may be sad enough, but it is far worse when the star is a close and tangible flame. The tale of Petit Jean de Saintré and the Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry afford the best possible commentary on Chaucer's Court life.

Heavily as we may discount the autobiographical touches in his early poems, there is still quite enough to show that, from his twenty-first year at least, he spent many years of love-longing and unrest, and that (as in Shakespeare's case) differences of rank added to his despair. It may well be that the references are to more than one lady; for there is no reason to suppose that Chaucer's affections were less mercurial than those of Burns or Heine, whose hearts were often enough in two or three places at once. But we have no reason to doubt him when he assures us, in 1369, that he has lost his sleep and his cheerfulness—

> I hold it to be a sickness
> That I have suffered this eight year,
> And yet my boote is never the nere;
> For there is physician but one
> That may me heal; but that is done.

Her name, he says about the same time, is Bounty, Beauty, and Pleasance; but her surname is Fair-Ruthless. Again, he tells us how he ran to Pity with his complaints of Love's tyranny; but, alas!

> I found her dead, and buried in an heart. . . .
> And no wight wot that she is dead but I.

The cruel fair stands high above him, a lady of royal excellence, humble indeed of heart, yet he scarce dares to call himself her servant—

Have mercy on me, thou serenest queen,
That you have sought so tenderly and yore,
Let some stream of your light on me be seen,
That love and dread you ever longer the more;
For, soothly for to say, I bear the sore,
And though I be not cunning for to plain,
For Goddës love, have mercy on my pain!

But all is vain, for in the end "Ye recke not whether I float or sink." Like the contemporary poets of Piers Plowman, Chaucer discovered soon enough that the high road to wisdom lies through "Suffer-both-well-and-woe;" and that, before we can possess our souls, we must "see much and suffer more."* There is more than mere graceful irony in the beautiful lines with which, a few years later, he begins his "Troilus and Criseyde." He is (he says) the bondservant of Love, one whose own woes help him to comfort others' pain, or again, to enlist the sympathy of Fortune's favourite—

But ye lovéres, that bathen in gladness,
If any drop of pity in you be,
Remembreth you on passéd heaviness
That ye have felt, and on th' adversitie
Of other folk, and thinketh how that ye
Have felt that Lovë durstë you displease,
Or ye have won him with too great an ease.

And prayeth for them that be in the case
Of Troilus, as ye may after hear,
That Love them bring in heaven to solace;
And eke for me prayeth to God so dear. . . .

And biddeth eke for them that be despaired
In love, that never will recovered be. . . .

And biddeth eke for them that be at ease,
That God them grant aye good perséverance,
And send them might their ladies so to please
That it to Love be worship and pleasance.
For so hope I my soulë best t' advance,
To pray for them that Lovë's servants be,
And write their woe, and live in charitie.

* "P. Plowman," B., x., 157, and xi., 402.

CHAPTER III

THE KING'S SQUIRE

For I, that God of Lovë's servants serve,
Dare not to Love for mine unlikeliness
Prayen for speed, though I should therefore sterve,
So far am I from this help in darkness!

"Troilus and Criseyde," i., 15

IN Chaucer's life, as in the "Seven Ages of Man," the soldier follows hard upon the lover; he is scarcely out of his 'teens before we find him riding to the Great War, "in hope to stonden in his lady grace." He fought in that strange campaign of 1359–60, which began with such magnificent preparations, but ended so ineffectually. Edward marched across France from Calais to Reims with a splendid army and an unheard-of baggage train; but the towns closed their gates, the French armies hovered out of his reach, and the weather was such that horses and men died like flies. "The xiii. day of Aprill [1360] King Edward with his Oost lay before the Citee off Parys; the which was a ffoule Derke day of myste, and off haylle, and so bytter colde, that syttyng on horse bak men dyed. Wherefore, unto this day yt ys called blak Monday, and wolle be longe tyme here affter." * Edward felt that the stars fought against him, and was glad to make a less advantageous peace than he might have had before this wasteful raid. Chaucer's friend and brother-poet, Eustache Deschamps, recalls how the English took up their quarters in the villages and convents that crown the heights round Reims, and watched

* "Chronicles of London," ed. Kingsford, p. 13.

forty days for a favourable opportunity of attack. Froissart also tells us how Edward feared to assault so strong a city, and only blockaded it for seven weeks, until "it began to irk him, and his men found nought more to forage, and began to lose their horses, and were at great disease for lack of victuals." It was probably on one of these foraging parties that Chaucer was cut off with other stragglers by the French skirmishers; and the King paid £16 towards his ransom.* The items in the same account range from £50 paid towards the ransom of Richard Stury (a distinguished soldier who was afterwards a fellow-ambassador of Chaucer's), to £6 13*s.* 4*d.* "in compensation for the Lord Andrew Lutterell's dead horse," and £2 towards an archer's ransom.

John Chaucer died in 1366, and his thrifty widow hastened to marry Bartholomew Attechapel; "the funeral bakemeats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables."† Geoffrey appears to have inherited little property from either of them; but it must be remembered that economies were difficult in the Middle Ages, so that men lived far more nearly up to their incomes than in modern times; and, again, that a considerable proportion of a citizen's legacies often went to the Church. The healthy English and American practice of giving a boy a good start and then leaving him to shift for himself was therefore even more common in the 14th century than now. This is essentially the state of things which we find described with amazement, and doubtless with a good deal of exaggeration, in the "Italian Relation of England" of a century later. The English tradesmen (says the author) show so little affection towards their children that "after having kept them at home till they arrive at the age of seven or nine

* These sums should be multiplied by about fifteen to bring them into terms of modern currency.

† The poet's grandmother was married at least thrice. Did he find hints for the "Wife of Bath" in his own family?

years at the utmost, they put them out, both males and females, to hard service in the houses of other people, binding them generally for another seven or nine years." Thus the children look more to their masters than to their natural parents, and, "having no hope of their paternal inheritance," set up on their own account and marry away from home.* From this source (proceeds the Italian) springs that greed of gain and that omnipotence of money, even in the moral sphere, which are so characteristic of England. John Chaucer may have left little property to his son, but he had given him an excellent education, and put him in the way of making his own fortune; for in 1367 we find him a yeoman of the King's chamber, and endowed with a life-pension of twenty marks "of our special grace, and for the good services which our beloved yeoman Geoffrey Chaucer hath rendered us and shall render us for the future." The phrase makes it probable that he had already been some little time in the King's service—very likely as early as the unlucky campaign in which Edward had helped towards his ransom—and other indications make it almost certain that he was by this time a married man. Nine years before this, side by side with Chaucer in the Countess of Ulster's household accounts, we find among the ladies one Philippa *Pan'*, with a mark of abbreviation, which probably stands for *panetaria*, or mistress of the pantry. Just as the Countess bought Chaucer's red-and-black hosen, so she paid "for the making of Philippa's trimmings," "for the fashioning of one tunic for Philippa,"† "for the making of a corset for Philippa and for the fur-work," "for XLVIII great buttons of . . . [unfortunate gap in the

* Quoted by Dr. Furnivall on p. xv. of his introduction to "Manners and Meals" (E.E.T.S., 1868).

† This tunic would, no doubt, be a cote-hardie, or close-fitting bodice and flowing skirt in one line from neck to feet; it may be seen, buttons and all, on the statuette of Edward III.'s eldest daughter which adorns his tomb in Westminster Abbey.

MS.] . . . bought in London by the aforesaid John Massingham for buttoning the aforesaid Philippa's trimmings"; and in each case her steward records the payment "for drink given to the aforesaid workmen according to the custom of London." Eight years after this (1366) the Queen granted a life-pension to her "damoiselle of the chamber," Philippa Chaucer. Six years later, again, Philippa Chaucer is in attendance upon John of Gaunt's wife; and in another two years we find her definitely spoken of as the wife of Geoffrey Chaucer, through whose hands her pension is paid on this occasion, and sometimes in later years. On the face of these documents the obvious conclusion would seem to be that the lady, who was certainly *Philippa Chaucer* in 1366, and equally certainly *Philippa, wife of Geoffrey Chaucer*, in 1374, was already in 1366 our poet's wife. The only argument of apparent weight which has been urged against it is in fact of very little account when we consider actual medieval conditions. It has been pleaded that if Chaucer complained in 1366 of an unrequited love which had tortured him for eight years and still overshadowed his life, he could not already be a married man. To urge this is to neglect one of the most characteristic features of good society in the Middle Ages. Even Léon Gautier, the enthusiastic apologist of chivalry, admits sadly that the feudal marriage was too often a loveless compact, except so far as the pair might shake down together afterwards;* and conjugal love plays a very secondary part in the great romances of chivalry. However apocryphal may be the alleged solemn verdict of a Court of Love that husband and wife had no right to be in love with each other, the sentence was at least recognized as *ben trovato;* and nobody who has closely studied medieval society, either in romance or in chronicle, would suppose that Chaucer blushed to feel a hopeless passion for another, or to write openly of it while he had a

* "La Chevalerie," Nouvelle Edition, pp. 342, 345 ff.

wife of his own. Dante's Beatrice, and probably Petrarch's Laura, were married women; and, however strongly we may be inclined to urge the exceptional and ethereal nature of these two cases, nothing of the kind can be pleaded for Boccaccio's Fiammetta and Froissart's anonymous lady-love. Chaucer, therefore, might well have followed the examples of the four greatest writers of his century. Moreover, in this case we have evidence that he and Philippa not only began, but continued and ended with at least a homœopathic dose of that "little aversion" which Mrs. Malaprop so strongly recommended in matrimony. His allusions to wedded life are predominantly disrespectful, or at best mockingly ironical; and though his own marriage may well have steadied him in some ways—Prof. Skeat points out that his least moral tales were all written after Philippa's death in 1387—yet the evidence is against his having found in it such companionship as might have chained his too errant fancy. The lives of Burne-Jones and Morris throw unexpected sidelights on that of the master whom they loved so well; and neither of them seems fully to have realized how much his own development owed to modern things for which seventeen generations of men have struggled and suffered since Chaucer's time. No artist of the Middle Ages—or, indeed, of any but quite recent times—could have earned by his genius a passport into society for wife and family as well as himself; nor could anything but a miracle have unbarred for Chaucer that paradise of splendid work, pure domestic felicity, and social success which attracts us so much in the life of Burne-Jones.* His wife was probably rather his social superior, and both would have had in any case a certain status as attendants at Court; but that was in itself an unhealthy life, and so far as Chaucer's poetry raised him above his fellow yeomen or fellow squires, so far that special favour would tend to separate him from his wife. A

* See the author's "From St. Francis to Dante," 2nd ed., pp. 350 ff.

courtly poet's married life could scarcely be happy in an age compounded of such social licence and such galling restrictions: an age when a man might recite the Miller's and Reve's tales in mixed company, yet a girl was expected not to speak till she was addressed, to fold her hands when she sat down, to keep her eyes fixed on the ground as she walked, to assume that all talk of love meant illicit love, and to avoid even the most natural familiarities on pain of scandal.* We may very easily exaggerate the want of harmony in the Chaucer household; but everything tends to assure us that his was not altogether an ideal marriage. When, therefore, he tells us he has long been the servant of Love, and that he is the very clerk of Love, we need not suppose any reference here to the lady who had been his wife certainly for some years, and perhaps for nearly twenty. Prof. Hales, however, seems to go a good deal too far in assuming that Philippa was in attendance on Constance, Duchess of Lancaster, while her husband lived snugly in bachelor apartments over Aldgate.†

But who, it may be asked, was this Philippa of the Pantry before she became Philippa Chaucer? Here again the indications, though tantalizingly slight, all point towards some connection with John of Gaunt, Chaucer's great patron. She was probably either a Swynford or a Roet, *i.e.* sister-in-law or own sister to Katherine Roet, who married Sir Thomas Swynford, and who became in after life first mistress and finally wife to John of Gaunt. From this marriage were

* That tales like these were read before ladies appears even from Bédier's judicial remarks in Petit de Juleville's "Hist. Litt.," vol. ii., p. 93; and I have shown elsewhere that these represent rather less than the facts. ("From St. Francis to Dante," 2nd ed., pp. 358, 359.) For girls' behaviour, see T. Wright's "Womankind in Western Europe," pp. 158, 159; "Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour," chap. 124 ff.; or "La Tour Landry," E.E.T.S., pp. 2. 175 ff.

† "House of Fame," Bk. II., l. 108; "Troilus," Bk. III., l. 41; Prof. Hales, in "Dict. Nat. Biog."

descended the great Beaufort family, of which the most powerful member, the Cardinal Minister of Henry VI., speaks in one of his letters of his *cousin*, Thomas Chaucer.* This again is complicated by the doubt which has been thrown on a Thomas Chaucer's sonship to Geoffrey, in spite of the definite assertion by the former's contemporary, Gascoigne, Chancellor of Oxford University.

Meanwhile, however, we are certain that Chaucer was in 1367 a Yeoman of Edward III.'s Chamber, and that he was promoted five years later to be a squire in the Royal household. The still existing Household Ordinances of Edward II. on one side, and Edward IV. on the other, agree so closely in their description of the duties of these two offices, that we may infer pretty exactly what they were in Chaucer's time. The earlier ordinances prescribe that the yeomen "shall serve in the chamber, making beds, holding and carrying torches, and divers other things which [the King] and the chamberlain shall command them. These [yeomen] shall eat in the chamber before the King. And each of them, be he well or ill, shall have for livery one darre† of bread, one gallon of beer, a *messe de gros*‡ from the kitchen, and yearly a robe in cloth or a mark in money; and for shoes 4*s.* 8*d.*, at two seasons in the year.§ And if any of them be sent out of the Court in the King's business, by his commandment, he shall have 4*d.* a day for his expenses." The later ordinances add to these duties "to attend the Chamber, to watch the King by course, to go messages, etc." The yeomen were bedded two by two, apparently on the floor of

* "Life Records," IV., Doc. No. 286.

† "Dole," "ration."

‡ "Mess of great meat," *i.e.* from one of the staple dishes, excluding such special dishes as would naturally be reserved for the King or his guests.

§ The legal tariff in the City of London at this time for shoes of cordwain (Cordova morocco) was 6*d.*, and for boots 3*s.* 6*d.* Cowhide shoes were fixed at 5*d.*, and boots at 3*s.* Riley, "Liber Albus," p. xc.

the great hall, so that visitors to Westminster Hall may well happen to tread on the spot where Chaucer nightly lay down to sleep. When he became a squire, he might either have found himself still on duty in the King's chamber, or else an "Esquire for the King's mouth," to taste the food for fear of poison, to carve for the King, and to serve his wine on bended knee. He still shared a bed with some fellow squire; but they now shared a servant also and a private room, to which each might bring at night his gallon or half gallon of ale; "and for winter season, each of them two Paris candles, one faggot, or else a half of tallwood." Besides his mess of great meat, he might now take a mess of roast also;* his wages were raised to 7½*d.* per day, and he received yearly "two robes of cloth, or 40*s.* in money." Moreover, as the Household Book of Edward IV. adds, "these esquires of household of old be accustomed, winter and summer, in afternoons and in evenings to draw to Lords Chambers within Court, there to keep honest company after their cunning, in talking of Chronicles of Kings, and of other policies, or in piping or harping, singing, or other acts martial, to help to occupy the Court, and accompany strangers till the time require of departing." The same compiler looks back to Edward III.'s time as the crown and glory of English Court life; and indeed that King lived on a higher scale (as things went in those days) than any other medieval English King except his inglorious grandson, Richard II. King John of France might indeed marvel to find himself among a nation of shopkeepers, and laugh at the thrift and order which

* This was exactly the commons of a chaplain of the King's chapel ("Life Records," ii., 15). The Dean of the Chapel was dignified with "two darres of bread, one pitcher of wine, two messes de grosse from the kitchen, and one mess of roast." Some of this, no doubt, would go to his servant. All the King's household, from the High Steward downwards (who might be a knight banneret), were allowed these messes from the kitchen as well as their dinners in hall.

WESTMINSTER HALL

(THE GREAT HALL OF THE KING'S PALACE AT WESTMINSTER)

underlay even his Royal cousin's extravagances.* But John's son, Charles the Wise, was destined to earn that surname by nothing more than by his imitation of English business methods in peace and war; and meanwhile the longest laugh was with Edward, whose Court swarmed with French prisoners and hostages. Among the enforced guests were King John himself, four royal dukes, the flower of the nobility, and thirty-six substantial citizens sent over by the great towns as pledges for the enormous war indemnity, which was in fact never fully paid. All these were probably still at Court when Chaucer first joined it, and few poets have ever feasted their youthful eyes on more splendid sights than this. Palaces and castles were filled to overflowing with the spoils of France; and the prisoners themselves vied with their captors in knightly sports and knightly magnificence. One of the royal princes had sixteen servants with him in his captivity; all moved freely about the country on parole, hawking and hunting, dancing and flouting, rather like guests than prisoners. Indeed, as Mme. Darmesteter truly remarks, there was a natural freemasonry between the French nobility and the French-speaking courtiers of England; and Froissart draws a vivid contrast between our manners and those of the Germans in this respect. "For English and Gascons are of such condition that they put a knight or a squire courteously to ransom; but the custom of the Germans, and their courtesy [to their prisoners] is of no such sort hitherto—I know not how they will do henceforth—for hitherto they have had neither pity nor mercy on Christian gentlemen who fall into their hands as prisoners, but lay on them

* "This same year [1359] the King held royally St. George Feast at Windsor, there being King John of France, the which King John said in scorn that he never saw so royal a feast, and so costly, made with tallies of tree, without paying of gold and silver" ("Chronicles of London," ed. 1827, p. 63). Queen Philippa received for this tournament a dress allowance of £3000 modern money (Nicolas, "Order of the Garter,' p. 41)

ransoms to the full of their estate and even beyond, and put them in chains, in irons, and in close prison like thieves and murderers; and all to extort the greater ransom." * The French lords added rather to the gaiety of a Court which was already perhaps the gayest in Europe; a society all the merrier because it was spending money that had been so quickly won; and because, in those days of shifting fortune, the shadow of change might already be foreboded on the horizon. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we may be captives in our turn. Few of the great leaders on either side escaped without paying ransom at least once in their lives; and the devil-may-care of the camp had its direct influence on Court manners. The extravagant and comparatively inartistic fashions which, at the end of the 14th century, displaced one of the simplest and most beautiful models of dress which have ever reigned, were invented, as a contemporary assures us, by "the unthrifty women that be evil of their body, and chamberers to Englishmen and other men of war that dwellen with them as their lemans; for they were the first that brought up this estate that ye use of great purfles and slit coats. . . . And as to my wife, she shall not; but the princesses and ladies of England have taken up the said state and guise, and they may well hold it if them list."† Towards the end of Chaucer's life, when Richard II. had increased his personal expenses in direct proportion to his ill-success in war and politics, the English Court reached its highest pitch of extravagance. The chronicler Hardyng writes—

> "Truly I herd *Robert Ireliffe* say,
> *Clerke of the grene cloth*, that to the household
> Came every daye, for moost partie alwaye,

* Froissart, ed. Luce, vol. v., p. 289, ff. Walsingham ("Hist. Ang.," an. 1389) bears equally emphatic testimony to the good natural feeling existing between the English and French gentry.

† "Knight of La Tour-Landry," E.E.T.S., p. 30 (written in 1371–2).

Ten thousand folke, by his messes tould,
That followed the hous, aye, as thei would ;
And in the kechin three hundred servitours,
And in eche office many occupiours.

"And ladies faire with their gentilwomen,
Chamberers also and lavenders,
Three hundred of them were occupied then :
Ther was greate pride among the officers,
And of al menne far passyng their compeers,
Of riche araye, and muche more costious
Than was before or sith, and more precious."

And he adds a description of Court morals which may well suggest further reflections on Chaucer's married life.*

But the Court was all that the poet could desire as a school of worldly manners, of human passion and character, and of gorgeous pageantry. The King travelled much with his household ; a grievous burden indeed to the poor country folk on whom his purveyors preyed, but to the world in general a glorious sight. He took with him a multitude of officers already suppressed as superfluous in the days of Edward IV., "as well Sergeants of Arms and Messagers many, with the twenty-four Archers before the King, shooting when he rode by the country, called *Gard Corpes le Roy.* And therefore the King journied not passing ten or twelve miles a day." Ruskin traces much of his store of observation to the leisurely journeys round England with his father in Mr. Telford's chaise ; and the young Chaucer must have gathered from these Royal progresses a rich harvest of impressions for future use.

* Eustache Deschamps, whose life and writings often throw so much light on Chaucer's, shows us the difficulties of married men at court, and says outright—

"Dix et sept ans ai au Satan servi
Au monde aussi et à la chair pourrie,
Oublié Dieu, et mon corps asservi
A cette cour, de tout vice nourrie."

(Sarradin, "Eustache Deschamps," pp. 92 ff., 104, 160.)

CHAPTER IV

THE AMBASSADOR

"Adieu, mol lit, adieu, piteux regards ;
Adieu, pain frais que l'on soulait trouver ;
Il me convient porter honneur aux lards ;
Il convient ail et biscuit avaler,
Et chevaucher un périlleux cheval."

EUSTACHE DESCHAMPS

ALTHOUGH we have nothing important dating from before his thirtieth year, we know from Chaucer's own words that he wrote many "Balades, Roundels, and Virelays" which are now lost; or, as he puts it in his last rueful Retractation, "many a song and many a lecherous lay." These were no doubt fugitive pieces, often written for different friends or patrons, and put abroad in their names. Besides these, we know that he translated certain religious works, including the famous "Misery of Human Life" of Pope Innocent the Third. Piety and Profanity, prayers and curses, jostle each other in Chaucer's early life as in the society round him: we may think of his own Shipman, thoroughly orthodox after his simple fashion, but silencing the too Puritanical parson with a rattling oath at close range, and proceeding to "clynken so mery a belle" that we feel a sort of treachery in pausing to wonder how such a festive tale could be brought forth for a company of pilgrims as a pill to purge heterodoxy!

The first of his early poems which we can date with any certainty is also the best worth dating. This is the "Dethe of Blaunche the Duchesse," in memory of John

of Gaunt's first wife, who died in September, 1369. The poem is obviously immature and unequal, but full of delightful passages, fresh to us even where the critics trace them to some obvious French source. Such, for instance, is the beginning of his dream, where he describes the inevitable May morning—inevitable in medieval verse, but here and there, when he or his fellow-poets are in their happiest mood, as fresh again as Nature herself, who is never tired of harping on the same old themes of sunshine and blue sky and fresh air. He wakes at dawn to hear the birds singing their matins at his eaves; his bedroom walls are painted with scenes from the "Romance of the Rose," and broad sunlight streams through the storied glass upon his bed. He throws open the casement: "blue, bright, clear was the air, nor in all the welkin was one cloud." A bugle rings out; he hears the trampling of horse and hounds; the Emperor Octavian's hunt is afoot—or, in plainer prose, King Edward the Third's. The poet joins them; a puppy comes up fawning, starting away, fawning again, until it has led him apart from the rest.

> It came and crept to me as low
> Right as it haddë me y-knowe,
> Held down his head and joined his ears,
> And laid all smoothë down his hairs.
> I would have caught it, and anon
> It fled, and was from me gone;
> And I him followed, and it forth went
> Down by a flowery greenë went [glade*
> Full thick of grass, full soft and sweet
> With flowerës fele, fair under feet. [many

Here he finds a young knight all in black, mourning by himself. A little unobtrusive sympathy unlocks the young man's heart. She was "my hap, my heal, and all my bliss;" "and goodë fairë White she hight." The first meeting had been as sudden as that of Dante and Beatrice: a medieval garden-party—"the fairest companye of ladies, that ever man with eye had seen

* See Preface to Second Edition, *ad fin.*

together in one place," and one among them who "was like none of all the rout," but who outshone the rest as the sun outshines moon and stars—

> For every hair upon her head,
> Sooth to say, it was not red;
> Nor neither yellow nor brown it was,
> Me thoughte most like gold it was.

Her eyes shone with such simple enjoyment of life that "fools" were apt to read a special welcome in her glance, to their bitter disappointment in course of time. She disdained the "knakkes smale," the little coquettish tricks of certain other ladies, who send their lovers half round the world, and give them but cold cheer on their return. The rest of the personal description is more commonplace, and (however faithful to medieval precedent) a little too like some modern sportsman's enumeration of his horse's points. The course of true love did not run too smoothly here. On the knight's first proposal, "she saidë 'nay!' all utterly." But "another year," when she had learned to know him better, she took him to her mercy, and they lived full many a year in bliss, only broken now by her death. The poem, which had rather dragged at the beginning, here ends abruptly, as though Chaucer had tired of it. He has no effectual comfort to offer in such a sorrow; the hunt breaks in upon their dialogue; King and courtiers ride off to a long white-walled castle on a hill, where a bell rings the hour of noon and wakes the poet from his dream.

When we have reckoned up all Chaucer's debts to his predecessors in this poem—and they are many—there is ample proof left of his own originality. Moreover, we cannot too often remind ourselves that the idea of copyright, either legal or moral, is modern. In the scarcity of books which reigned before the days of printing, the poet who "conveyed" most might well be the greatest benefactor to mankind. The educated public, so far as such a body then existed, rather

encouraged than reprobated the practice of borrowing; and the poet, like the modern schoolboy versifier, was applauded for his skill in weaving classical tags into his own work. Chaucer differed from his predecessors, and most of his successors, less in the amount which he borrowed than in the extraordinary vitality and originality which he infused into the older work. If we had only these fragments of his early works, we should still understand how Deschamps praises him as "King of worldly love in Albion"; we should still feel something of that charm of language which earned the poet his popularity at Court and his promotion to important offices.

It is well known that medieval society had not developed the minute sub-divisions of labour which have often been pushed to excess in modern times. The architect was simply a master-mason; the barber was equally ready to try his hand on your beard or on a malignant tumour; the King might choose for his minister a frankly incapable personal favourite, or send out his most gorgeously accoutred knights on a reconnaissance which would have been infinitely better carried out by a trained scout. Similarly, the poets of the 14th century were very frequently sent abroad as ambassadors; Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio had already set Chaucer this example, which his friend Eustache Deschamps was soon to follow. The choice implied, no doubt, a subtle tribute to the power of rhetoric, under which category poetry was often classed. The rarity of book-learning did not indeed give the scholar a higher value in general society than he commands nowadays, or bring more grist to his mill; he and his horse were commonly lean enough, and his only worldly treasures were his score of books at his bed's head. But the medieval mind, which persistently invested lunatics with the highest prophetic qualities, seems to have had an equally touching faith in poetic clairvoyance at times when common sense was at fault, and

to have called upon a Dante or a Chaucer just as, in similar emergencies, it called upon particular saints whose intercession was least invoked in everyday life. Much, of course, is to be explained by the fact that formal and elaborate public speeches were as necessary as spectacular display on these embassies; but, even so, we may wonder that the Ravennati ever entrusted an embassy to Dante, who is recorded to have been so violent a political partisan that he was capable of throwing stones even at women in the excitement of discussion. Chaucer, however, had neither the qualities nor the defects of such headlong fanaticism; and from the frequency with which he was employed we may infer that he showed real talents for diplomacy.

His first employment of the kind was in 1370, when, a year after he had taken part in a second French campaign, he was "abroad in the King's service" during the summer. Whither he went is uncertain, probably to the Netherlands or Northern France, since his absence was brief. In 1371 and 1372 he regularly received his pension with his own hands (as the still extant household accounts of Edward III. show), until November of the latter year, when he "was joined in a commission with James Pronam and John de Mari, citizens of Genoa, to treat with the Duke, citizens, and merchants of Genoa, for the purpose of choosing some port in England where the Genoese might form a commercial establishment."* This journey lasted about a year, and Chaucer received for his expenses 138 marks, or about £1400 modern value. The roll which records these payments mentions that Chaucer's business had taken him to Florence as well as Genoa; and here, as so often happens in history, a stray word recorded in the driest of business documents opens out a vista of things in themselves most romantic.

Of all that makes the traveller's joy in modern Italy, the greater part was already there for Chaucer to see,

* Quoted by Nicolas from Rymer's "Fœdera," new ed., iii., 964.

with much more that he saw and that we never shall. The sky, the air, and the landscape were practically the same, except for denser forests, and, no doubt, fewer lemon and orange trees. The traveller, it is true, was less at leisure to observe some of these things, and less inclined to find God's hand in the mountains or the sea. Chaucer is so far a man of his time as to show no delight in the sterner moods of Nature; we find in his works none of that true love of mountain scenery which comes out in the "Pearl" and in early Scottish poetry; and when he has to speak of Custance's sea-voyages, he expedites them as briefly and baldly as though they had been so many business journeys by rail. Deschamps, and the anonymous English poet of fifty years later, show us how little cause a man had to love even the Channel passage in the rough little boats of those days, "a perilous horse to ride," indeed; rude and bustling sea-folk, plentiful tributes to Neptune, scant elbow room—

> "Bestow the boat, boatswain, anon,
> That our pilgrims may play thereon;
> For some are like to cough and groan . . .
> This meanëwhile the pilgrims lie
> And have their bowlës fast them by
> And cry after hot Malvoisie . . .
> Some laid their bookës on their knee,
> And read so long they might not see:—
> 'Alas! mine head will cleave in three!'" *

Worse passages still were matters of common history; Froissart tells us how Hervé de Léon "took the sea [at Southampton] to the intent to arrive at Harfleur; but a storm took him on the sea which endured fifteen days, and lost his horse, which were cast into the sea, and Sir Hervé of Léon was so sore troubled that he had never health after." King John of France, a few years later, took eleven days to cross the

* E.E.T.S., "Stacions of Rome," etc., p. 37. (The whole English poem describes a journey to Spain; but as yet the pilgrims are not out of the Channel.)

Channel,* and Edward III. had one passage so painful that he was reduced to explain it by the arts of "necromancers and wizards." Moreover, nearly all Chaucer's embassies came during those evil years after our naval defeat of 1372, when our fleets no longer held the Channel, and the seas swarmed with French privateers. Nor were the mountains less hated by the traveller, or less dangerous in reality, with their rude horse-tracks and ruder mountain-folk, half herdsmen, half brigands. First there were the Alps to be crossed, and then, from Genoa to Florence, "the most desolate, the most solitary way that lies between Lerici and Turbia."† But, after all these difficulties, Italy showed herself as hospitable as the approaches had been inhospitable:

> "Il fait bien bon demeurer
> Au doux château de Pavie."‡

We must not forget these more material enjoyments, for they figure largely among the impressions of a still greater man, in whose intellectual life the journey to Italy marks at least as definite an epoch; not the least delightful passages of Goethe's *Italienische Reise* are those which describe his delight in seeing the oranges grow, or the strange fish brought out of the sea.

For Goethe, the soul of Italy was in its pagan antiquity; but Chaucer found there a living art and living literature, the noblest in the then world. The great semicircle of houses standing upon projecting arches round the harbour of Genoa, which survived to be drawn by Ruskin in their decay, would at once strike a noble note of contrast to the familiar wooden dwellings built over Thames shingle at home; everywhere he would find greater buildings and brighter colours than in our northern air. The pale ghosts of frescoes which we study so regretfully were then in their first freshness, with thousands more which have long since

* Froissart (Globe ed.), pp. 83, 134; "Eulog. Hist.," iii., 206, 213.
† Dante, "Purg.," iii., 49.
‡ Sarradin, "Deschamps," pp. 67, 69.

disappeared. Wherever he went, the cities were already building, or had newly built, the finest of the Gothic structures which adorn them still; and Chaucer must have passed through Pisa and Florence like a new Æneas among the rising glories of Carthage. A whole population of great artists vied with each other in every department of human skill—

> "Qualis apes aestate nova per florea rura
> Exercet sub sole labor—"

Giotto and Andrea Pisano were not long dead; their pupils were carrying on the great traditions; and splendid schools of sculpture and painting flourished, especially in those districts through which our poet's business led him. Still greater was the intellectual superiority of Italy. To find an English layman even approaching in learning to Dante, or a circle of English students comparable to that of Petrarch and Boccaccio, we must go forward nearly two centuries, to Sir Thomas More and the eve of the Reformation. Moreover, the stimulus of Dante's literary personality was even greater than the example of his learning. On the one hand, he summed up much of what was greatest in the thought of the Middle Ages; on the other, he heralded modern freedom of thought by his intense individualism and the frankness with which he asserted his own personal convictions. More significant even than the startling freedom with which Dante wielded the keys of heaven and hell is the fundamental independence of his whole scheme of thought. When he set the confessedly adulterous Cunizza among the blessed, and cast down so many popes to hell, he was only following with unusual boldness a fairly common medieval precedent. But in taking as his chief guides through the mysteries of religion a pagan poet, a philosopher semi-pagan at the best, and a Florentine lady whom he had loved on earth—in this choice, and in his corresponding independence of expression, he gave an impetus

to free thought far beyond what he himself can have intended. Virgil's parting speech at the end of the "Purgatorio," "Henceforward take thine own will for thy guide. . . . I make thee King and High Priest over thyself," conveyed a licence of which others availed themselves more liberally than the man who first uttered it. Dante does indeed work out the problem of life for himself, but he does so with the conclusions of St. Bernard and Hugh, of St. Victor, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventura, always before his eyes. Others after him followed his liberty of thought without starting from the same initial attachment to the great theologians of the past; and, though Petrarch and Boccaccio lived and died as orthodox Roman Catholics, yet their appeal to the literature of antiquity had already begun the secular and even semi-pagan intellectual movement which goes by the name of the Renaissance. In short, the Italian intellect of the 14th century afforded a striking example of the law that an outburst of mysticism always provokes an equally marked phase of free thought; enthusiasm may give the first impulse, but cannot altogether control the direction of the movement when it has once begun. It will be seen later on that Chaucer was no stranger to the religious difficulties of his age. The ferment of Italian free thought seems (as Professor ten Brink has remarked) to have worked effectually upon a mind which "was going through an intense religious crisis."* Dante's mysticism may well have carried Chaucer off his feet for a time; we probably owe to this, as well as to his regret for much that had been wasted in his youth, the religious poems which are among the earliest extant from his pen. "Chaucer's A. B. C.," a rapturous hymn to the Virgin, strikes, from its very first line, a note of fervour far beyond its French original; few utterances of medieval devotion approach more perilously near to Mariolatry than this—"Almighty and all-merciable Queen"! Another poem of the same period

* "Hist. of Eng. Lit.," vol. ii., p. 57, trans. W. C. Robinson.

is the "Life of St. Cecilia," with its repentant prologue, its hymn to the Virgin translated from Dante, and its fervent prayer for help against temptation—

> Now help, thou meek and blissful fairë maid
> Me flemëd wretch in this desert of gall ; [banished
> Think on the woman Canaanee, that said
> That whelpës eaten some of the crumbës all
> That from their lordës table been y-fall ;
> And though that I, unworthy son of Eve
> Be sinful, yet accept now my believe. . . .
> And of thy light my soul in prison light,
> That troubled is by the contagion
> Of my body, and also by the weight
> Of earthly lust, and false affection :
> O haven of refuge, O salvation
> Of them that be in sorrow and in distress
> Now help, for to my work I will me dress.*

But much as Chaucer translated bodily from Dante in different poems, and mighty as is the impulse which he owns to having received from him, the great Florentine's style impressed him more deeply than his thought. In matter, Chaucer is far more akin to Petrarch and Boccaccio, from whom he also borrowed even more freely. But in style he owes most to Dante, as Dante himself owes to Virgil. We may clearly trace this influence in Chaucer's later concentration and perfection of form; in the pains which he took to bend his verse to every mood, and in the skilful blending of comedy and tragedy which enabled Chaucer so far to outdo Petrarch and Boccaccio in the tales which he borrowed from them. Much of this was, no doubt, natural to him; but neither England nor France could fully have developed it. His two Italian journeys made him a changed man, an artist in a sense in which the word can be used of no English poet before him, and of none

* "Cant. Tales," G., 57 ff. It will be noted how ill the phrase "son of Eve" suits the Nun's mouth. In this, as in other cases, Chaucer simply worked one of his earlier poems into the framework of the "Canterbury Tales."

after him until the 16th century brought English men of letters again into close communion with Italian poetry.

Did Chaucer make the personal acquaintance, on this first Italian journey, of Petrarch and Boccaccio, who were beyond dispute the two greatest living men of letters in Europe besides himself? His own words in the prologue of the "Clerk's Tale" would seem to testify to personal intercourse with the former; and most biographers have assumed that it is not only the fictitious Clerk, but the real poet, who confesses to have learned the story of Griselda straight from Petrarch. The latter, as we know from his own letters, was in the height of his enthusiasm about the tale, which he had just translated into Latin from the "Decameron" during the very year of Chaucer's visit; and M. Jusserand justly points out that the English poet's fame was already great enough in France to give him a ready passport to a man so interested in every form of literature, and with such close French connections, as Petrarch. The meeting has been strongly doubted, partly on the ground that whereas the Clerk learned the tale from Petrarch "at Padua," the aged poet was in fact during Chaucer's Italian journey at Arquà, a village sixteen miles off in the Euganean hills. It has, however, been conclusively proved that the ravages of war had driven Petrarch down from his village into the fortified town of Padua, where he lived in security during by far the greater part, at any rate, of this year; so that this very indication of Padua, which had been hastily assumed as a proof of Chaucer's ignorance, does in fact show that he possessed such accurate and unexpected information of Petrarch's whereabouts as might, of itself, have suggested a suspicion of personal intercourse.* This is admirably illustrated by the story

* See a correspondence in the *Athenæum*, Sept. 17 to Nov. 26, 1898 (Mr. C. H. Bromby and Mr. St. Clair Baddeley), and Mr. F. J. Mather's two articles in "Modern Language Notes" (Baltimore), vol. xi., p. 210, and vol. xii., p. 1.

of Chaucer's relations with the other great Italian, Boccaccio. Since Chaucer certainly went to Florence, and probably left only a few weeks, or even a few days, before Boccaccio's first lecture there on Dante; since, again, he copies or translates from Boccaccio even more than from Petrarch, it has been naturally suggested that the two must have met. But here we find a curious difficulty. Great as are Chaucer's literary obligations to the author of the "Decameron," he not only never mentions him by name, but, on those occasions where he quotes directly and professes to acknowledge his authority, he invariably gives some other name than Boccaccio's.* It is, of course, barely conceivable that the two men met and quarrelled, and that Chaucer, while claiming the right of "conveying" from Boccaccio as much as he pleased, not only deliberately avoided giving the devil his due, but still more deliberately set up other false figures which he decked out with Boccaccio's true feathers. But such a theory, which should surely be our last resort in any case, contradicts all that we know of Chaucer's character. Almost equally improbable is the suggestion that, without any grudge against Boccaccio, Chaucer simply found it convenient to hide the amount of his indebtedness to him. Here again (quite apart from the assumed littleness for which we find no other evidence in Chaucer) we see that in Dante's and Petrarch's cases he proclaims his debt with the most commendable frankness. The third theory, and on the whole the most probable, is that Chaucer translated from Italian books which, so far as he was concerned, were anonymous or pseudonymous. Medieval manuscripts were quite commonly written without anything like the modern title-page; and, even when the author's name was recorded on the first page, the frequent loss of that sheet by use left the book nameless, and at the mercy of any possessor who chose to deck it with a title after

* See Dr. Koch's paper in "Chaucer Society Essays," Pt. IV.

his own fancy.* Therefore it is not impossible that Chaucer, who trod the streets of Boccaccio's Florence, and saw the very trees on the slopes of Fiesole under which the lovers of the "Decameron" had sat, and missed by a few weeks at most the bodily presence of the poet, may have translated whole books of his without ever realizing their true authorship. In those days of difficult communication, no ignorance was impossible. In 1371 the King's Ministers imagined that England contained 40,000 parishes, while in fact there were less than 9000. Chroniclers, otherwise well informed, assure us that the Black Death killed more people in towns like London and Norwich than had ever lived in them. Bishop Grandisson of Exeter, one of the most remarkable prelates of the 14th century, imagined Ireland to be a more populous country than England. It is perfectly possible, therefore, that Chaucer and Boccaccio, who were in every way so close to each other during these twelve months of 1372–3, were yet fated to remain strangers to each other; and this lends all the more force to the fact that Chaucer knew Petrarch to have spent the year at Padua, and not at his own home.

It may be well to raise here the further question: Had not Chaucer already met Petrarch on an earlier Italian journey, which would relegate this of 1372–3 to the second place? In 1368, Lionel of Clarence was married for the second time to Violante Visconti of Milan. Petrarch was certainly an honoured guest at this wedding, and Speght, writing in 1598, quotes a report that Chaucer was there too in attendance on his old master. This, however, was taken as disproved by the more recent assertion of Nicholas that Chaucer drew his pension in England "with his own hands" during all this time. Here again, however, Mr. Bromby's

* Froissart's great poem of Méliador thus became anonymous for nearly five centuries, and was only identified by the most romantic chance in our own generation.—Darmesteter, "Froissart," chap. xiii.

researches have reopened the possibility of the old tradition.* He ascertained, by a fresh examination of the original Issue Rolls, that the pension was indeed paid to Geoffrey Chaucer on May 25th, while the wedding party was on its way to Milan, but the words *into his own hands* are omitted from this particular entry. The omission may, of course, be merely accidental; but at least it destroys the alleged disproof, and leaves us free to take Speght's assertion at its intrinsic worth. Chaucer's own silence on the subject may have a very sufficient cause, the reason which he himself puts into the Knight's mouth in protest against the Monk's fondness for tragedies—

> . . . for little heaviness
> Is right enough to many folk, I guess.
> I say for me it is a great dis-ease,
> Where as men have been in great wealth and ease,
> To hearen of their sudden fall, alas!

Few weddings have been more tragic than that of Chaucer's old master. The Duke, tallest and handsomest of all the Royal princes, set out with a splendid retinue, taking 457 men and 1280 horses over sea with him. There were great feasts in Paris and in Savoy by the way; greater still at Milan on the bridegroom's arrival. But three months after the wedding "my lord Lionel of England departed this world at Asti in Piedmont. . . . And, for that the fashion of his death was somewhat strange, my lord Edward Despenser, his companion, who was there, made war on the Duke of Milan, and harried him more than once with his men; but in process of time my lord the Count of Savoy heard tidings thereof and brought them to one accord." This, and another notice equally brief, is all that we get even from the garrulous Froissart about this splendid and tragic marriage, with its suspicion of Italian poison, at which he himself was present.†

* *Athenæum*, as above.

† Froissart, ed. Buchon, i. 546, 555; Darmesteter, p. 32.

Why should not Chaucer have been equally reticent? Indeed, we know that he was, for he never alludes to a tragedy which in any case must have touched him very nearly, just as he barely mentions two other far blacker chapters in his life—the Black Death, and Wat Tyler's revolt. It is still possible, therefore, to hope that he may have met Petrarch not only at Padua in 1372–3, but even earlier at the magnificent wedding feast of Milan.

CHAPTER V

THE MAN OF BUSINESS

"Oh! that any muse should be set upon a high stool to cast up accounts and balance a ledger."—*Times*

THE Italian journey of 1372–3 was far from being Chaucer's last embassy. In 1376 he was abroad on secret service with Sir John Burley; in February of next year he was associated on another secret mission with Sir Thomas Percy, afterwards Earl of Worcester, and Hotspur's partner at the battle of Shrewsbury; so that our poet, if he had lived only three years longer, would have seen his old fellow-envoy's head grinning down from the spikes of London Bridge side by side with "a quarter of Sir Harry Percy."* In April of the same year he was sent to Montreuil with Sir Guichard d'Angle and Sir Richard Stury, for no less a matter than a treaty of peace with France. The French envoys proposed a marriage between their little princess Marie, aged seven, and the future Richard II., only three years older; a subject upon which the English envoys seem to have received no authority to treat. So the embassy ended only in a very brief extension of the existing truce; the little princess died a few months afterwards, and Chaucer lived to see the great feasts in London twenty-one years later, when Richard took to second wife Marie's niece Isabella, then only in her eighth year. In January 1378, our poet was again associated with Sir Guichard d'Angle and two others on a mission

* C. L. Kingsford, "Chronicles of London," p. 63.

to negotiate for Richard's marriage with one of poor little Marie's sisters. Here also the discussions came to nothing; but already in May Chaucer was sent with Sir Edward Berkeley on a fresh embassy to Italy. This time it was to treat "of certain matters touching the King's war" with the great English *condottiere* Sir John Hawkwood, and with that tyrant of Milan who was suspected of having poisoned Prince Lionel, and whose subsequent fate afforded matter for one of the Monk's "tragedies" in the "Canterbury Tales"—

> Of Milan greatë Barnabo Viscount,
> God of delight and scourge of Lombardye.

During this journey Chaucer appointed for his agents in England the poet John Gower and another friend, Richard Forrester, of whom we shall hear once more. He was home again early in February of the next year; and this, so far as we know, was the last of his diplomatic missions.

It would take us too far afield to consider all the attendant circumstances of these later embassies, important as they are for showing the high estimate put on Chaucer's business talents, and much as they must have contributed to form that many-sided genius which we find fully matured at last in the poet of the "Canterbury Tales." But they show us that he travelled in the best of company and saw many of the most remarkable European cities of his day; that he grappled, and watched others grapple, first with the astute old counsellors who surrounded Charles the Wise, and again with the English adventurer whose prowess was a household word throughout Italy, and who had married an illegitimate sister of Clarence's Violante Visconti, with a dowry of a million florins. These journeys, however, brought him no literary models comparable to those which he had already found: Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio reigned supreme in his mind until the latest and ripest days of all, when he became no longer

the mere translator and adapter (with however fresh a genius) of French and Italian classics, but a classic himself, master of a style that could express all the accumulated observations of half a century—Chaucer of the English fields and highways, Chaucer of English men and women, and no other man. The analysis and criticism of the works which he produced in the years following the first Italian journey belongs to literary history. It only concerns me here to sum up what the literary critics have long since pointed out; how full a field of ideas the poet found in these years of travel, how busily he sucked at every flower, and how rich a store he brought home for his countrymen. For a hundred and fifty years, Chaucer was practically the only channel between rough, strong, unformed England and the greatest literature of the Middle Ages. Moreover, in him she possessed the poet whom, if we measure not only by beauty of style but by width of range, we must put next to Dante himself. He was to five generations of Englishmen that which Shakespeare has been to us ever since.

It is delightful to take stock of these fruitful years of travel and observation, but more delightful still to follow the poet home and watch him at work in the dear busy London of his birth. From the time of his return from the first Italian journey we find him in evident favour at court. On St. George's day, 1374, he received the grant of a pitcher of wine daily for life, "to be received in the port of London from the hands of the King's butler." Such grants were common enough; but they take us back in imagination to the still earlier times from which the tradition had come down. St. George's was a day of solemn feasting in the Round Tower of Windsor; Chaucer would naturally enough be there on his daily services. Edward, the Pharaoh at the birthday feast, lifted up his head from among his fellow-servants by a mark of special favour for services rendered during the past year. But

the grant was already in those days more picturesque than convenient; we soon find Chaucer drawing a periodical money-equivalent for the wine; and in 1378 the grant was commuted for a life-pension of about £200 modern value.

Shortly after this grant of wine came a far greater stroke of fortune. Chaucer was made Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidies, with the obligation of regular attendance at his office in the Port of London, and of writing the rolls with his own hand. Those which still exist, however, are almost certainly copies. Presently he received the grant of a life-pension from John of Gaunt as well as from the King. His wife also had pensions from both, so that the regular income of the household amounted to some £1000 a year of modern money. To this must be added considerable windfalls in the shape of two lucrative wardships and a large share of a smuggled cargo of wool which Chaucer had discovered and officially confiscated. Yet with all this he seems to have lived beyond his means, and we find him forestalling his pension. In 1382 Chaucer's financial prosperity reached its climax, for he received another comptrollership which he might exercise by deputy. Two years later, he was permitted to appoint a deputy to his first comptrollership also; and in this same year, 1386, he was elected to sit in Parliament as Knight of the Shire for the county of Kent. He had already, in 1385, been appointed a justice of the peace for the same county, in company with Sir Simon Burley, warden of the Cinque Ports, and other distinguished colleagues. Indeed, only one untoward event mars the smooth prosperity of these years. In 1380, Cecilia Chaumpaigne renounced by a formal deed, witnessed among others by three knights, all claims which she might have against our poet "*de raptu meo.*" *Raptus* often means simply *abduction*, and it may well be that Chaucer was simply concerned in just such an attempt upon Cecilia as had been made upon his own father,

who, as it will be remembered, had narrowly escaped being married by force to Joan de Westhale for the gratification of other people's private interests. This is rendered all the more probable by two other documents connected with the same matter which have been discovered by Dr. Sharpe.* It is, however, possible that the *raptus* was a more serious affair; and Professor Skeat has pointed out the coincidence that Chaucer's "little son Lowis" was just ten years old in 1391. It is true that the poet would, by this interpretation, have been guilty of felony, in which case a mere deed of renunciation on Cecilia's part could not legally have settled the matter; but the wide divergences between legal theory and practice in the Middle Ages renders this argument less conclusive than it might seem at first sight. It is certain, however, that abductions of heiresses from motives of cupidity were so frequent at this time as to be recognized among the crying evils of society. The Parliament of 1385–6 felt bound to pass a law exacting that both the abductor and the woman who consented to abduction should be deprived of all inheritance and dowry, which should pass on to the next of kin.† But medieval laws, as has long ago been remarked, were rather pious aspirations than strict rules of conduct; and it is piquant to find our errant poet himself among the commissioners appointed to inquire into a case of *raptus*, just seven years after his own escapade.‡

During the twelve years from 1374 to 1386 Chaucer

* Chaucer Soc., "Life Records," iv., p. xxx.

† "Eulog. Hist.," iii., 357: Statutes of Parliament, Ric. II., an. 6, c. 6. The preamble complains that such "malefactors and raptors of women grow more violent, and are in these days more rife than ever in almost every part of the kingdom," and it implies that married women were sometimes so carried off. Cf. Jusserand, "Vie Nomade," p. 85, and "Piers Plowman," B. iv., 47—

> "Then came Peace into Parliament, and put forth a bill,
> How wrong against his will had his wife taken,
> And how he ravished Rose, Reginald's love," etc., etc.

‡ "Life Records," iv., p. xxxv.

occupied those lodgings over the tower of Aldgate which are still inseparably connected with his name. This was probably by far the happiest part of his career, and (with one exception presently to be noticed) the most productive from a literary point of view. Here he studied with an assiduity which would have been impossible at court, and which must again have been far less possible in his later years of want and sordid shifts. Here he translated Boethius, of whose philosophical "Consolations" he was so soon to stand in bitter need. Here he wrote from French, Latin, and Italian materials that "Troilus and Cressida" which is in many ways the most remarkable of all his works. In 1382 he composed his "Parliament of Fowls" in honour of Richard II.'s marriage with Anne of Bohemia; then came the "House of Fame" and the "Legend of Good Women." These two poems, like most of Chaucer's work, are unfinished, and unequal even as they stand. We cannot too often remind ourselves that he was no professional *litterateur*, but a courtier, diplomatist, and man of business whose genius impelled him to incessant study and composition under conditions which, in these days, would be considered very unfavourable in many respects. But his contemporaries were sufficiently familiar with unfinished works of literature. Reading was then a process almost as fitful and irregular as writing; and in their gratitude for what he told them, few in those days would have been inclined to complain of all that Chaucer "left half-told." So the poet freely indulged his genius during these Aldgate days, turning and returning the leaves of his French and Italian legendaries, and evoking such ghosts as he pleased to live again on earth. Whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down; and that is one secret of his freshness after all these centuries.

This period of quiet and prosperity culminates, as has been said, in his election to the Parliament of 1386 as a Knight of the Shire for Kent. His contemporary,

Froissart, has left us a picture of a specially solemn parliament held in 1337 to declare war against France, "at the palace of Westminster; and the Great Hall was all full of prelates, nobles, and counsellors from the cities and good towns of England. And there all men were set down on stools, that each might see the King more at his ease. And the said King was seated like a pontiff, in cloth of Rouen, with a crown on his head and a royal sceptre in his hand. And two degrees lower sat prelate, earl, and baron; and yet below them were more than six hundred knights. And in the same order sat the men of the Cinque Ports, and the counsellors from the cities and good towns of the land. So when all were arrayed and seated in order, as was just, then silence was proclaimed, and up rose a clerk of England, licentiate of canon and civil law, and excellently provided of three tongues, that is to say of Latin, French, and English; and he began to speak with great wisdom; for sir Robert of Artois was at his side, who had instructed him two or three days before in all that he should say." Chaucer's Parliament sat more probably in the Great Chapter House of Westminster, and certainly passed off with less order and unanimity than Froissart's of 1337, though the main theme was still that of the French War, into which the nation had plunged so light-heartedly a generation earlier. In spite of Crécy and Poitiers and a dozen other victories in pitched battles, our ships had been destroyed off La Rochelle in 1372 by the combined fleets of France and Castile; since which time not only had our commerce and our southern seaport towns suffered terribly, but more than once there had been serious fears for the capital. In 1377 and 1380 London had been put into a state of defence;* and now, in 1386, it was known that the French were collecting enormous forces for invasion. The incapacity of their King and his advisers did indeed deliver us finally from this danger; but, when Chaucer and his

* Riley, "Memorials," pp. 410, 445.

fellow-members assembled on October 1, "it had still seemed possible that any morning might see the French fleet off Dover, or even at the mouth of the Thames." * The militia of the southern counties was still assembled to defend the coast, while twenty thousand from the Midlands lay round London, ill-paid, starving, and beginning to prey on the country; for Richard II. had wasted his money on Court pleasures or favourites. The Commons refused to grant supplies until the King had dismissed his unpopular ministers; Richard retired in a rage to Eltham, and Parliament refused to transact business until he should return. In this deadlock, the members deliberately sought up the records of the deposition of Edward II., and this implied threat was too significant for Richard to hold out any longer. As a contemporary puts it, "The King would not come to Parliament, but they sent for the statute whereby the second Edward had been judged, and under pain of that statute compelled the King to attend." † The Houses then impeached and imprisoned Suffolk, one of the two unpopular ministers, and put Richard himself under tutelage to a Council of Reform. Supplies having been voted, the King dismissed his Parliament on November 28 with a plain warning that he intended to repudiate his recent promises; and he spent the year 1387 in armed preparations.

Meanwhile, however, other *protégés* of his had suffered besides the great men of whom all the chronicles tell us. The Council of Reform had exacted from Richard a commission for a month "to receive and dispose of all crown revenues, to enter the royal castles and manors, to remove officials and set up others in their stead." ‡ Sir Harris Nicolas shows from the rolls of this Parliament that the commission was issued "for inquiring, among other alleged abuses, into the state of the

* Oman, "England, 1377–1485," p. 100.
† "Eulog. Hist.," iii. 359.
‡ Ibid., 360.

Subsidies and Customs; and as the Commissioners began their duties by examining the accounts of the officers employed in the collection of the revenue, the removal of any of those persons soon afterwards, may, with much probability, be attributed to that investigation." It is not necessary to suppose that Chaucer had been specially negligent as a man of business, though it may have been so, and his warmest admirer would scarcely contend that what we know of the poet's character points to any special gifts of regularity or punctual order. We know that the men who now governed England made it their avowed object to remove all creatures of the King; and everything tends to show that Chaucer had owed his offices to Court favour. At this moment then, when Richard's patronage was a grave disadvantage, and when Chaucer's other great protector, John of Gaunt, was abroad in Spain, flying a wild-goose chase for the crown of Castile—at such a moment it was almost inevitable that we should find him among the first victims; and already in December both his comptrollerships were in other men's hands. Even in his best days he seems to have lived up to his income; and this sudden reverse would very naturally drive him to desperate shifts. It is not surprising, therefore, that we soon find him assigning his two pensions to one John Scalby (May 1, 1388).

But before this Philippa Chaucer had died. In 1386 she was at Lincoln with her patron, John of Gaunt, and a distinguished company; and there she was admitted into the Cathedral fraternity, together with Henry of Derby, the future Henry IV.* At Midsummer, 1387, she received her quarter's pension as usual, but not at

* That is, they contributed to maintain the Minster, and were admitted to a share of the spiritual benefits earned by "all prayers, fastings, pilgrimages, almsdeeds, and works of mercy" connected therewith. Edward III., and at least three of his sons, were already of the fraternity of Lincoln, and Richard II., with his queen, were admitted the year after Philippa Chaucer.

Michaelmas; and thenceforward she disappears from the records. Her death, of course, still further reduced the poet's already meagre income; but, as Professor Skeat points out, we have every indication that Chaucer made a good literary use of this period of enforced leisure and straitened means. In the years 1387 and 1388 he probably wrote the greater part of the "Canterbury Tales."

Next year came a pleasant change of fortune. The King, after a vain attempt to reassert himself by force of arms, had been obliged to sacrifice many of his trustiest servants; and the "Merciless Parliament" of 1388 executed, among other distinguished victims, Chaucer's old colleagues Sir Nicholas Brembre and Sir Simon Burley. Richard, with rage in his heart, bided his time, and gave plenty of rope to the lords who had reduced him to tutelage and impeached his ministers. Then, when their essential factiousness and self-seeking had become manifest to the world, he struck his blow. In May, 1389, "he suddenly entered the privy council, took his seat among the expectant Lords, and asked, 'What age am I?' They answered that he had now fulfilled twenty years. 'Then,' said he, 'I am of full age to govern my house, my servants, and my realm . . . for every heir of my realm who has lost his father, when he reaches the twentieth year of his age, is permitted to manage his own affairs as he will.'" He at once dismissed the Chancellor and Treasurer, and presently recalled John of Gaunt from Spain as a counterpoise to John's factious younger brother, the Duke of Gloucester.

With one patron thus returned to power, and another on his way, it was natural that Chaucer's luck should turn. Two months after this scene in Council he was appointed by Richard II. "Clerk of our Works at our Palace of Westminster, our Tower of London, our Castle of Berkhampstead, our Manors of Kennington, Eltham, Clarendon, Shene, Byfleet, Chiltern Langley,

and Feckenham, our Lodges at Hathebergh in our New Forest, and in our other parks, and our Mews for falcons at Charing Cross; likewise of our gardens, fish-ponds, mills and park enclosures pertaining to the said Palace, Tower, Castles, Manors, Lodges, and Mews, with powers (by self or deputy) to choose and take masons, carpenters and all and sundry other workmen and labourers who are needed for our works, wheresoever they can be found, within or without all liberties (Church fee alone excepted); and to set the same to labour at the said works, at our wages." Our poet had also plenary powers to impress building materials and cartage at the King's prices, to put the good and loyal men of the districts on their oath to report any theft or embezzlement of materials, to bring back runaways, and "to arrest and take all whom he may here find refractory or rebellious, and to cast them into our prisons, there to remain until they shall have found surety for labouring at our Works according to the injunctions given in our name." That these time-honoured clauses were no dead letter, is shown by the still surviving documents in which Chaucer deputed to Hugh Swayn and three others his duties of impressing workmen and impounding materials, by the constant petitions of medieval Parliaments against this system of "Purveyance" for the King's necessities, and by different earlier entries in the Letter-Books of the City of London. Search was made throughout the capital for fugitive workmen; they were clapped into Newgate without further ceremony; and one John de Alleford seems to have made a profitable business for a short while by "pretending to be a purveyor of our Lord the King, to take carpenters for the use of the King in order to work at the Castle of Windsor." *

* Riley, "Memorials," pp. 271, 285, 321. The Masons' regulations given on p. 281 of the same book are interesting in connection with Chaucer's work; but still more so are the documents in "York Fabric Rolls" (Surtees Soc.), pp. 172, 181.

We have a curious inventory of the "dead stock" which Chaucer took over from his predecessors in the Clerkship, and for which he made himself responsible; the list ranges from "one bronze image, two stone images unpainted, seven images in the likeness of Kings" for Westminster Palace, with considerable fittings for the lists and galleries of a tournament, and 100 stone cannon balls for the Tower, down to "one broken cable . . . one dilapidated pitchfork . . . three sieves, whereof two are crazy."* For all this, which he was allowed to do by deputy, Chaucer received two shillings a day, or something like £450 a year of modern money.† Further commissions of the same kind were granted to him: the supervision of the works at St. George's Chapel, Windsor, which was "threatened with ruin, and on the point of falling to the ground;" and again of a great scaffold in Smithfield for the Royal party on the occasion of the tournament in May, 1390. Two months earlier in this same year he had been associated with his old colleague Sir Richard Stury and others on a commission to repair the dykes and drains of Thames from Greenwich to Woolwich, which were "so broken and ruined that manifold and inestimable damages have happened in times past, and more are feared for the future." A marginal note on a MS. of his "Envoy to Scogan," written some three years later, states that the poet was then living at Greenwich; and a casual remark in the "Canterbury Tales" very probably points in the same direction.‡ Either in 1390 or 1391 a Geoffrey Chaucer, who was probably the poet, was appointed Forester of North Petherton Park in Somerset.

But here again we find one single mischance break-

* "Life Records," iv. 282, 283.

† A well-to-do youth could be boarded at Oxford for 2*s.* a week, and it was reckoned that the whole expenses of a Doctor of Divinity could be defrayed for thrice that sum, or half Chaucer's salary. (Riley, "Memorials," p. 379; Reynerus, "de Antiq. Benedict," pp. 200, 596.)

‡ A. 3907. "Lo Grenewych, ther many a shrewe is inne."

ing the even tenour of Chaucer's new-born prosperity. In September, 1390, while on his journeys as Clerk of the Works, he was the victim of at least two, and just possibly three, highway robberies (of which two were on one day) at Westminster, and near "The Foul Oak" at Hatcham. Two of the robbers were in a position to claim benefit of clergy; Thomas Talbot, an Irishman, was nowhere to be found; and the fourth, Richard Brerelay, escaped for the moment by turning King's evidence. He was, however, accused of another robbery in Hertfordshire, and attempted to save his life by charging Thomas Talbot's servant with complicity in the crime. This time the accused offered "wager of battle." Brerelay was vanquished in the duel, and strung up out of hand.

It is difficult to resist the conviction that Chaucer was by this time recognized as an unbusiness-like person; for the King deprived him of his Clerkship in the following June (1391), at a time when we can find nothing in the political situation to account for the dismissal.

CHAPTER VI

LAST DAYS

"I strove with none, for none was worth my strife:
Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art.
I warmed both hands before the fire of life:
It sinks; and I am ready to depart."

W. S. LANDOR

FROM this time forward Chaucer seems to have lived from hand to mouth. He had, as will presently be seen, a son, stepson, or foster-son of considerable wealth and position; and no doubt he had other good friends too. We have reason to believe that he was still working at the "Canterbury Tales," and receiving such stray crumbs from great men's tables as remained the main reward of literature until modern times. In 1391 (if we may judge from the fact that problems in the book are calculated for that year) he wrote the "Treatise on the Astrolabe" for the instruction of his ten-year-old son Lewis.* It was most likely in 1393 that he wrote from Greenwich the "Envoy" to his friend Henry Scogan, who was then with the Court at Windsor, "at the stream's head of grace." The poet urges him there to make profitable mention of his friend, "forgot in solitary wilderness" at the lower end of the same river; and it is natural to connect this

* "Little Lowys my son, I aperceive well by certain evidences thine ability to learn sciences touching numbers and proportions; and as well consider I thy busy prayer in special to learn the treatise of the Astrelabie." Excusing himself for having omitted some problems ordinarily found in such treatises, Chaucer says, "Some of them be too hard to thy tender age of X. year to conceive."

with the fact that, in 1394, Richard granted Chaucer a fresh pension of £20 a year for life. But the King's exchequer was constantly empty, and we have seen that the poet's was seldom full; so we need not be surprised to find him constantly applying for his pension at irregular times during the rest of the reign. Twice he dunned his royal patron for the paltry sum of 6*s.* 8*d.* More significant still is a record of the Court of Common Pleas showing that he was sued by Isabella Buckholt for the sum of £14 1*s.* 11*d.* some time between April 24 and May 20, 1398; the Sheriff of Middlesex reported that Chaucer had no possessions in his bailiwick. On May 4 the poet obtained letters of protection, in which the King alludes formally to the "very many arduous and urgent affairs" with which "our beloved esquire" is entrusted, and therefore takes him with "his men, lands, goods, rents, and all his possessions" under the Royal protection, and forbids all pleas or arrests against him for the next two years. The recital of these arduous and urgent affairs is no doubt (like that of Chaucer's lands and rents) a mere legal form; but the protection was real. Isabella Buckholt pressed her suit, but the Sheriff returned in October, 1398, and June, 1399, that the defendant "could not be found." Yet all this time Chaucer was visible enough, for he was petitioning the King for formal letters patent to confirm a grant already made by word of mouth in the preceding December, of a yearly butt of wine from the Royal cellars "for God's sake, and as a work of charity." This grant, valued at about £75 of modern money, was confirmed on October 13, 1398, and was the last gift from Richard to Chaucer. Before twelve months were gone, the captive King had ravelled out his weaved-up follies before his pitiless accusers in the Tower of London; and on the very 13th of October, year for year, on which Chaucer had received his butt of wine from Richard II., a fresh poetical supplication brought him a still greater favour

from the next King. Henry IV. granted on his own account a pension of forty marks in addition to Richard's; and five days afterwards we find Chaucer pleading that he had "accidentally lost" the late King's letters patent for the pension and the wine, and begging for their renewal under Henry's hand. The favour was granted, and Chaucer was thus freed from any uncertainty which might have attached to his former grants from a deposed King, even though one of them was already recognized and renewed in Henry's letters of October 13.*

"King Richard," writes Froissart, "had a greyhound called Math, who always waited upon the king and would know no man else; for whensoever the king did ride, he that kept the greyhound did let him loose, and he would straight run to the king and fawn upon him and leap with his fore feet upon the king's shoulders. And as the king and the earl of Derby talked together in the court, the greyhound, who was wont to leap upon the king, left the king and came to the earl of Derby, duke of Lancaster, and made to him the same friendly countenance and cheer as he was wont to do to the king. The duke, who knew not the greyhound, demanded of the king what the greyhound would do. 'Cousin,' quoth the king, 'it is a great good token to you and an evil sign to me.' 'Sir, how know you that?' quoth the duke. 'I know it well,' quoth the king, 'the greyhound maketh you cheer this day as king of

* "Life Records," iv., Nos. 250, 270, 277. The great significance of this fact is obscured even by such excellent authorities as Prof. Skeat, Prof. Hales, and Mr. Pollard, who all follow Sir Harris Nicolas in misinterpreting the last of these three documents. Chaucer had not lost, as they represent, Henry's own letters patent of only five days before, but Richard's patents for the yearly £20 and the tun of wine. It is quite possible that Chaucer may have been obliged to leave them in pledge somewhere, or that they were momentarily mislaid; but it is natural to suspect that the poet would not so lightly have reported them as lost unless it had been to his obvious interest to do so. We must remember the trouble and expense constantly taken by public bodies, for instance, to get their charters ratified by a new king.

England, as ye shall be, and I shall be deposed. The greyhound hath this knowledge naturally; therefore take him to you; he will follow you and forsake me.' The duke understood well those words and cherished the greyhound, who would never after follow king Richard, but followed the duke of Lancaster: [and more than thirty thousand men saw and knew this."*] The fickle hound did but foreshadow the bearing of Richard's dependents in general. The poem in which Chaucer hastened to salute the new King of a few days breathed no word of pity for his fallen predecessor, but hailed Henry as the saviour of England, "conqueror of Albion," "very king by lineage and free election."† In the months that followed, while Chaucer enjoyed his wine and his pension, the King who first gave them was starving himself, or being starved by his gaolers, at Pontefract. It must of course be remembered that, while Richard was felt on all hands to have thrown his splendid chances wantonly away, Henry was the son of Chaucer's best patron; and indeed the poet had recently been in close relations with the future King, if not actually in his service.‡ Still, we know that few were willing to suffer in those days for untimely faith to a fallen sovereign, and we ourselves have less reason to blame the many, than to thank the luckier stars under which such trials of loyalty are spared to our generation. Chaucer's contemporary and fellow-courtier, Froissart, might indeed write bitterly in his old age about a people which could change its ruler like an old glove; but Froissart was at ease in his fat canonry of Chimay; while Chaucer, with a hundred poets before and since, had chirped like a cricket all through the summer, and was now face to face with cold and starvation in the winter of his life.

* Globe ed., p. 464; Buchon, iii., 349.

† "Complaint to his Purse," last stanza.

‡ "Life Records," iv., p. xlv. In 1395 or 1396 Chaucer received £10 from the clerk of Henry's great wardrobe, to be paid into Henry's hands.

His own last poems invite us to pause here a moment; for they smack of old age, infirmities, and disillusions. When he writes now of love, it is in the tone of Wamba the Witless: "Wait till you come to forty year!" There is the half-ironical ballad to Rosamond, a young beauty whom he must be content to admire now from afar, yet upon whom he dotes even so—

> Was never pike wallowed in galantine
> As I in love am wallowed and y-bound.

Or again the triple roundel to Merciless Beauty, most uncomplimentary in the outspoken triumph-note of its close—

> Since I from Love escapèd am so fat,
> I never think to be in his prison lean;
> Since I am free, I count him not a bean.
> He may answèr, and sayë this or that;
> I do no force, I speak right as I mean [I care no whit
> *Since I from Love escapèd am so fat,*
> *I never think to be in his prison lean.*
> Love hath my name y-struck out of his slate,
> And he is struck out my bookës clean
> For evermore; there is none other mean.
> *Since I from Love escapèd am so fat,*
> *I never think to be in his prison lean;*
> *Since I am free, I count him not a bean!*

Then we have "The Former Age"—a sigh for the Golden Past, and a tear for the ungrateful Present—

> Alas, alas! now may men weep and cry!
> For in our days is nought but covetise
> And doubleness, and treason, and envÿ,
> Prison, manslaughter, and murder in sundry wise.*

Then again a series of four ballads on Fortune, beginning "This wretched worldës transmutacioun"; a "Complaint of Venus"; the two begging epistles to Scogan and Henry IV.; a satire against marriage addressed to his friend Bukton; a piteous complaint entitled "Lack

* Though the subject-matter of this poem is mainly taken from Boethius, yet it evidently has the translator's hearty approval, and is in tune with many more of his later verses.

of Steadfastness," and two moral poems on Gentilesse (true Gentility) and on Truth. The last of these is not only the most truly poetical of them all, but also the bravest and most resigned—

> Flee from the press, and dwell with Soothfastness . . .
> That thee is sent, receive in buxomness [obedience
> The wrestling for this world asketh a fall [requires, implies
> Here is no home, here is but wilderness:
> Forth, Pilgrim, forth! Forth, beast, out of thy stall!
> Know thy countree, look up, thank God of all;
> Hold the high way, and let thy ghost thee lead,
> And Truth shall thee deliver, it is no dread.

The bitter complaints against his own times which occur in these later poems are of the ordinary medieval type; the courage and resignation are Chaucer's own, and give a strangely modern ring to his words. He had indeed reached a point of experience at which all centuries are drawn again into closer kinship, just as early childhood is much the same in all countries and all ages of the world. There is something in Chaucer's later writings that reminds us of Renan's "pauvre âme déveloutée de soixante ans." All through life this shy, dreamy-eyed, full-bodied poet showed remarkable detachment from the history of his own times. Professor Raleigh has pointed out that his avoidance of all but the slightest allusions to even the greatest of contemporary events may well seem deliberate, however much allowance we may make for the fact that the landmarks of history are, in their own day, half overgrown by the common weeds of daily life. But, for all his detachment and his shyness of autobiographical allusions, there is one unmistakable contrast between his earliest and latest poems: and we may clearly trace the progress from youthful enthusiasms to the old man's disillusions. Yet there is no bitterness in Chaucer's old age; we see in him what Ruskin calls "a Tory of the old school—Walter Scott's school, that is to say, and Homer's"; loyal to monarchy and deeply distrustful of democracy,

yet never doubting the King's ultimate responsibility to his people. We see his resignation to the transitory nature of earthly happiness, even though he cannot quite forgive life for its disappointments. His later ironies on the subject of love tell their own tale. No man can mistake them for the jests of him that never felt a wound; rather, we may see how the old scars had once bled and sometimes burned still, though there was no reason why a man should die of them. He anticipates in effect Heine's tragi-comic appeal, "Hate me, Ladies, laugh at me, jilt me, but let me live!" For all that we have lost or missed, the world is no mere vale of tears—

> But, lord Christ! when that it remembreth me
> Upon my youth, and on my jollity,
> It tickleth me about mine heartë-root.
> Unto this day it doth mine heartë boot
> That I have had my world as in my time!
> But Age, alas!——

well, even Age has its consolations—

> The flour is gone, there is no more to tell,
> The bran, as I best can, now must I sell!

There we have, in a couple of lines, the philosophy of Chaucer's later years—to take life as we find it, and make the best of it. If he had cared to take up the full burden of his time, there were plenty of themes for tragedy. The world seemed to grow madder and madder as the 14th century drew to its close; Edward III.'s sun had gone down in disgrace; his grandson's brilliant infancy had passed into a childish manhood, whose wayward extravagances ended only too naturally in the tragedy of Pontefract; the Emperor Wenceslas was a shameless drunkard, and Charles VI. of France a raving madman; Pope Urban VI. seemed half crazy, even to his own supporters.* The Great Pestilence and

* Michelet, "Hist. de France," Liv. VI., *ad fin.* A cardinal explained the extreme violence of Urban VI.'s words and actions by the report "that he could not avoid one of two things, lunacy or total collapse; for

the Papal Schism, the Jacquerie in France, and the Peasants' Revolt in England, had shaken society to its foundations; but Chaucer let all these things go by with scarcely more than a shrug of his shoulders.

To the contemporary authors of Piers Plowman, and in a less degree to John Gower, the world of that time was Vanity Fair in Bunyan's sense; a place of constant struggle and danger, in which every honest pilgrim marches with his back to the flames of the City of Destruction, marks their lurid glare on the faces of the crowd, and sees the slightest gesture magnified into shadows that reach to the very stars. To Chaucer the poet it was rather Thackeray's Vanity Fair: a place where the greatest problems of life may be brought up for a moment, but can only be dismissed as insoluble; where humanity is far less interesting than the separate human beings which compose it; where we eat with them, talk with them, laugh and weep with them, yet play with them all the while in our own mind; so that, when at last it draws towards sunset, we have no more to say than "come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for the play is played out." But behind and beneath Chaucer the poet was Chaucer the man, whose last cry is recorded at the end of the "Canterbury Tales." Everything points to a failure of his health for some months at any rate before his death. The monks of Westminster were no doubt often at his bedside; and, though he had evidently drifted some way from his early creed, we must beware of exaggerations on this point.* Moreover, even if his unorthodoxy had been far greater than we have any reason to believe, it needed a temper very different from Chaucer's to withstand, under medieval conditions, the terrors of the Unknown and the constant visitations of the clergy.

he never ceased drinking, yet ate nothing." Baluze, "Vit. Pap. Aven.," vol. i., col. 1270. Compare Walsingham's tone with regard to the Pope, "Hist. Angl.," an. 1385.

* Chaucer's religious belief will be more fully discussed in Chapter XXIV.

Indeed, it seems superfluous to offer any explanation or apology for a document which is, on its face, as true a cry of the heart as the dying man's instinctive call for his mother. "I beseech you meekly of God" (so runs the epilogue to the "Parson's Tale") "that ye pray for me that Christ have mercy on me and forgive me my guilts—and namely [especially] of my translations and enditings of worldly vanities. . . . And many a song and many a lecherous lay, that Christ for His great mercy forgive me the sin . . . and grant me grace of very penitence, confession and satisfaction to do in this present life, through the benign grace of Him that is King of Kings and Priest over all Priests, that bought us with the precious blood of His heart; so that I may be one of them at the day of doom that shall be saved."

But we are anticipating. The generosity of Henry IV., as we have seen, had brought Chaucer once again into easy circumstances, and within a few weeks we find him leasing from the Westminster Abbey "a tenement, with its appurtenances, situate in the garden of St. Mary's Chapel," *i.e.* somewhere on the site of the present Henry VII.'s chapel, sheltered by the south-eastern walls of the Abbey church, and "nigh to the White Rose Tavern"; for in those days the Westminster precincts contained houses of the most miscellaneous description, which all enjoyed the privilege of sanctuary. Near this spot, in 1262, Henry III. had ordered pear trees to be planted "in the herbary between the King's Chamber and the Church."* "He that plants pears, plants for his heirs," says the old proverb; and it is pleasant to believe that Chaucer enjoyed at least the blossom of this ancient orchard, if not its fruit. He took the house at a rent of four marks for as many of the next fifty-three years as his life might last; but he was not fated to enjoy it for so many weeks. In February, 1400, he drew an instalment of one of his pensions; in June another instalment was paid through the hands of one

* W. R. Lethaby, "Westminster Abbey," 1906, p. 2.

William Somere; and then the Royal accounts record no more. He died on October 25, according to the inscription on his tomb, the first literary monument in that part of the Abbey which has since received the name of Poet's Corner.* It is probable that we owe this fortunate circumstance still more to the fact that Chaucer was an Abbey tenant than to his distinction as courtier or poet. When Gower died, eight years later, his body was laid just as naturally among the Austin Canons of Southwark with whom he had spent his last years

The industry of Mr. Edward Scott has discovered that this same house in St. Mary's Chapel garden was let, from at least 1423 until his death in 1434, to Thomas Chaucer, who was probably the poet's son. This Thomas was a man of considerable wealth and position. He began as a *protégé* of John of Gaunt, and became Chief Butler to Richard II., Henry IV., and Henry V. in succession; Constable of Wallingford Castle, and M.P. for Oxfordshire in nine parliaments between 1402 and 1429. He was many times Speaker, a commissioner for the marriage of Henry V., and an Ambassador to treat for peace with France; fought at Agincourt with a retinue of twelve men-at-arms and thirty-seven archers; became a member of the King's Council, and died a very rich man. His only daughter made two very distinguished marriages; and her grandson was that Earl of Lincoln whom Richard III. declared his heir-apparent. For a while it seemed likely that Geoffrey Chaucer's descendants would sit on the throne of England, but the Earl died in fight against Henry VII. at Stoke. Of the poet's "little son Lewis" we hear no more after that

* Stow (Routledge, 1893, p. 414) seems to imply that the poet was first buried in the cloister, but this is an obvious error. Dr. Furnivall has pointed out a line of Hoccleve's which certainly seems to imply that the younger poet was present at his master Chaucer's death-bed. We may also gather from Hoccleve's account of his own youth many glimpses which tend to throw interesting sidelights on that of Chaucer (Hoccleve's Works, E.E.T.S., vol. i., pp. xii., xxxi.).

brief glimpse of his boyhood; and Elizabeth Chaucy, the only other person whom we can with any probability claim as Chaucer's child, was entered as a nun at Barking in 1381, John of Gaunt paying £51 8*s.* 2*d.* for her expenses. It is just possible, however, that this may be the same Elizabeth Chausier who was received as a nun in St. Helen's priory four years earlier, at the King's nomination; in this case the date would point more probably to the poet's sister.

This is not the place for any literary dissertation on Chaucer's poetry, which has already been admirably discussed by many modern critics, from Lowell onwards. He did more than any other man to fix the literary English tongue: he was the first real master of style in our language, and retained an undisputed supremacy until the Elizabethan age. This he owes (as has often been pointed out) not only to his natural genius, but also to the happy chances which gave him so wide an experience of society. Living in one of the most brilliant epochs of English history, he was by turns lover, courtier, soldier, man of business, student, ambassador, Justice of the Peace, Member of Parliament, Thames Conservator, and perhaps even something of an architect, if he took his Clerkship of the Works seriously. All these experiences were mirrored in eyes as observant, and treasured in as faithful a memory, as those of any other English poet but one; and to these natural gifts of the born portrait-painter he added the crowning quality of a perfect style. If his writings have been hailed as a "well of English undefiled," it was because he spoke habitually, and therefore wrote naturally, the best English of his day, the English of the court and of the higher clergy. In this he was even more fortunate than Dante, as he surpassed Dante in variety (though not in intenseness) of experience, and as he knew one more language than he. When we note with astonishment the freshness of Chaucer's characters across these five centuries, we must always remember that his

exceptional experience and powers of observation were combined with an equally extraordinary mastery of expression. It is because Chaucer's speech ranges with absolute ease from the best talk of the best society, down to the Miller's broad buffoonery or the north-country jargon of the Cambridge students, that his characters seem to us so modern in spite of the social and political revolutions which separate their world from ours. It will be my aim to portray, in the remaining chapters, the England of that day in those features which throw most light on the peculiarities of Chaucer's men and women.

CHAPTER VII

LONDON CUSTOM-HOUSE

"Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green;
Think, that below bridge the green lapping waves
Smite some few keels that bear Levantine staves,
Cut from the yew wood on the burnt-up hill,
And pointed jars that Greek hands toiled to fill,
And treasured scanty spice from some far sea,
Florence gold cloth, and Ypres napery,
And cloth of Bruges, and hogsheads of Guienne;
While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
Moves over bills of lading——"

W. MORRIS

THERE are two episodes of Chaucer's life which belong even more properly to Chaucer's England; in which it may not only be said that our interest is concentrated less on the man than on his surroundings, but even that we can scarcely get a glimpse of the man except through his surroundings. These two episodes are his life in London, and his Canterbury Pilgrimage; and with these we may most fitly begin our survey of the world in which he lived.

The most tranquilly prosperous period of the poet's life was that space of twelve years, from 1374 to 1386, during which he lived over the tower of Aldgate and worked at the Customs House, with occasional interruptions of foreign travel on the King's business. The Tower of London, according to popular belief, had its foundations cemented with blood; and this was only too

true of Chaucer's Aldgate. It was a massive structure, double-gated and double-portcullised, and built in part with the stones of Jews' houses plundered and torn down by the Barons who took London in 1215. But, in spite of similar incidents here and there, England was generally so free from civil war that the townsfolk were very commonly tempted to avoid unnecessary outlay upon fortifications. The traveller in Germany or Switzerland is often surprised to see even villages strongly walled against robber barons; while we may find great and wealthy English towns like Lynn and Cambridge which had little other defence than a ditch and palisade.* Even in fortified cities like London, the tendency was to neglect the walls—at one period we find men even pulling them gradually to pieces †—and to let the towers or gates for private lodgings. As early as the last year of Edward I., we find Cripplegate thus let out; and such notices are frequent in the "Memorials of London Life," collected by Mr. Riley from the City archives. ‡

Here Chaucer had only half a mile to go to his daily work, by streets which we may follow still. If he took the stricter view, which held that gentlefolk ought to begin their day with a Mass, and to hear it fasting, then he had at least St. Michael's, Aldgate, and All Hallows Stonechurch on his direct way, and two others within a few yards of his road. If, however, he was of those who preferred to begin the day with a sop of wine or "a draught of moist and corny ale," then the noted hostelry of the Saracen's Head probably stood even

* This was occasionally the case even in Normandy until the English invasion. The great city of Caen, for instance, was still unwalled in 1346. ("Froissart," ed. Buchon, p. 223.) A piece of London Wall may still be found near the Tower at the bottom of a small passage called Trinity Place, leading out of Trinity Square. It rises about twenty-five feet from the present ground-level.

† Riley, "Memorials," p. 79. This was in 1310.

‡ See pp. 50, 59, 79, 95, 115, 127, 136, 377, 387, 388, 489. My frequent references to this book will be simply to the name of Riley.

then, and had stood since the time of the Crusades, within a few yards of Aldgate Tower. Close by the fork of Fenchurch and Leadenhall Streets he would pass a "fair and large-built house," the town inn of the Prior of Hornchurch. Then, in Fenchurch Street, the mansion and garden of the Earls of Northumberland, and again, at the corner of Mart Lane, the manor and garden of Blanch Apleton. Turning down Mart Lane (now corrupted into *Mark*), the poet would pass the great chain, ready to be stretched at any moment across the narrow street, which marked the limits of Aldgate and Tower Street wards. He would cross Tower Street a few yards to the eastward of "the quadrant called Galley Row, because galley men dwelt there." These galley men were "divers strangers, born in Genoa and those parts," whose settlement in London had probably been the object of Chaucer's first Italian mission, and who presently prospered sufficiently to fill not only this quadrant, but also part of Minchin Lane, and to possess a quay of their own. But, like their cousins the Lombards, these Genoese soon showed themselves smarter business men even than their hosts. They introduced unauthorized halfpence of Genoa, called "Galley halfpence"; and these, with similar "suskings" from France, and "dodkins" from the Low Countries, survived the strict penalties threatened by two Acts of Parliament, and lasted on at least till Elizabeth's reign. "In my youth," writes Stow, "I have seen them pass current, but with some difficulty, for the English halfpence were then, though not so broad, somewhat thicker and stronger."* Stow found a building on the quay which he identified with their hall. "It seemeth that the builders of the hall of this house were shipwrights, and not carpenters;" for it was clinker-built like a boat, "and seemeth as it were a galley, the keel turned upwards." But this building was probably later than Chaucer's time. The galley quay almost

* Ed. Morley, pp. 154–157.

touched that of the Custom-House; and here our poet had abundant opportunities of keeping up his Italian while sampling the "wines of Crete and other sweet wines in one of the cellars, and red and white wines in the other cellar." * His poems show an appreciation of good vintages, which was no doubt partly hereditary and partly acquired on the London quays, where he could talk with these Mediterranean mariners and drink the juice of their native grapes, remembering all the while how he had once watched them ripening on those southern slopes—

> How richly, down the rocky dell,
> The torrent vineyard streaming fell
> To meet the sun and sunny waters
> That only heaved with a summer swell! †

When Chaucer began his work in 1374 there was no regular building for the Customs; the King hired a house for the purpose at £3 a year, and a single boatman watched in the port to prevent smuggling. In 1383, however, one John Churchman built a house, which Richard II. undertook to hire for the rest of the builder's life; this became the first Custom-House, and lasted until Elizabeth's reign. The lease gives its modest proportions exactly: a ground floor, in which the King kept his weigh-beams for wool and other merchandise; a "solar," or upper chamber, for a counting-house; and above this yet another solar, 38 by 21½ feet, partitioned into "two chambers and one *garret*, as men call it." For this new house the King paid the somewhat higher rent of £4. Chaucer was bound by the terms of his appointment to do the work personally, without substitute, and to write his "rolls touching the said office with his own hand"; but it is probable that he accepted these terms with the usual medieval licence. He went

* Riley, p. 270.

† From his first Italian journey Chaucer returned on May 23, 1373; but his second was during the summer and early autumn of 1378. (May 28 to Sept. 19.)

abroad at least five times on the King's service during his term of office; and the two original rolls which survive are apparently not written by his hand. His own words in the "House of Fame" show that he took his book-keeping work at the office seriously; but it is not likely that the press of business was such as to keep him always at the counting-house; and he may well have helped his boatman to patrol the port, which extended down-river to Gravesend and Tilbury. It is at least certain that, in 1376, he caught John Kent smuggling a cargo of wool away from London, and so earned prize-money to the value of £1000 in modern currency. It is certain also that his daily work for twelve years must have kept him in close daily contact with sea-faring folk, who, from Homer's days at least, have always provided the richest food for poetry and romance. The commonest seaman had stirring tales to tell in those days, when every sailor was a potential pirate, and foreign crews dealt with each other by methods still more summary than plank-walking.* Moreover, there was even more truth than now in the proverb that "far fowls have fair feathers"; and the Genoese on Galley Quay had sailed many seas unknown even to the tempest-tossed shipman of Dartmouth, whose southern limit was Cape Finisterre. They had passed the Pillars of Hercules, and seen the apes on the Rock of Gibraltar, and shuddered from afar at the Great Whirlpool of the Bay of Biscay, which sucked in its floods thrice daily, and thrice belched them forth again; and into which about this time "four vessels of the town of Lynn, steering too incautiously, suddenly fell, and were swallowed up under their comrades' eyes."†

Moreover, the very streets and markets of London then presented a pageant unquestionably far more inspiring to a man of Chaucer's temperament than anything that can be seen there to-day. It is easy to

* "Cant. Tales," Prol. i., 400.

† Walsingham, "Hist. Angl.," an. 1406, *ad fin.*

exaggerate the contrast between modern and medieval London, if only by leaving out of account those subtle attractions which kept even William Morris from tearing himself away from the much-abused town. It is also undeniable that, however small and white, Chaucer's London was not clean, even to the outward eye; and that the exclusive passion for Gothic buildings is to some extent a mere modern fashion, as it was the fashion two hundred years ago to consider them a positive eyesore. To some great poet of the future, modern London may well supply a grander canvas still; but to a writer like Chaucer, content to avoid psychological problems and take men and things as they appear on the surface, there was every possible, inspiration in this busy capital of some 40,000 souls where everybody could see everything that went on, and it was almost possible to know all one's fellow-citizens by sight. Some streets, no doubt, were as crowded as any oriental bazaar; but most of the buying and selling went on in open market, with lavish expenditure of words and gestures; while the shops were open booths in which the passer-by could see master and men at their work, and stop to chat with them on his way. In the absence of catalogues and advertisements, every man spread out his gayest wares in the sun, and commended them to the public with every resource of mother-wit or professional rhetoric. Cornhill and Cheapside were like the Mercato Vecchio at Florence or St. Mark's Square at Venice. Extremes meet in modern London, and there is theme enough for poetry in the deeper contrasts that underlie our uniformity of architecture and dress. But in Chaucer's London the crowd was almost as motley to man's eye as to God's—

> Barons and burgesses and bondmen also . . .
> Baxters and brewsters and butchers many,
> Woolwebsters and weavers of linen,
> Tailors and tinkers and tollers in markets,

Masons and miners and many other crafts . . .
Of all-kind living labourers leapt forth some,
As dykers and delvers that do their deeds ill,
And drive forth the long day with *Dieu vous sauve, Dame Emme*
Cooks and their knaves cried "Hot pies, hot!
Good griskin and geese! go dine, go!
Taverners unto them told the same [tale]
"White wine of Alsace and red wine of Gascoyne,
Of the Rhine and of Rochelle, the roast to defye!" [digest.

The very sticks and stones had an individuality no less marked. The churches, parish and monastic, stood out as conspicuously as they still stand in Norwich, and were often used for secular purposes, despite the prohibitions of synods and councils. For even London had in Chaucer's time scarcely any secular public buildings, while at Norwich, one of the four greatest towns in the kingdom, public meetings were sometimes held in the Tolhouse, sometimes in the Chapel of St. Mary's College, in default of a regular Guildhall. The city houses of noblemen and great churchmen were numerous and often splendid, and Besant rightly emphasizes this feudal aspect of the city; but he seems in his enumeration of the lords' retainers to allow too little for medieval licence in dealing with figures; and certainly he has exaggerated their architectural magnificence beyond all reason.† But at least the ordinary citizens' and artisans' dwellings presented the most picturesque variety. Here and there a stone house, rare enough to earn special mention in official documents; but most of the dwellings were of timber and plaster, in front and behind, with only side-gables of masonry for some sort of security against the spreading

* "P. Plowman," B. Prol., 216. The French words in italics were the first line of a popular song. Gower has an equally picturesque description in his "Mirour de l'Omme," 25,285 ff.

† "London was, in very truth, a city of Palaces. There were, in London itself, more palaces than in Venice and Florence and Verona and Genoa all together." "Medieval London," i., 244, where the context shows that the author refers not only to royal residences, but still more to noblemen's houses.

THE TOWER, WITH LONDON BRIDGE IN THE BACKGROUND

(FROM MS. ROY. 16 F. ii, f. 73 ; A LATE 15TH CENTURY MS. OF THE POEMS OF CHARLES D'ORLÉANS)

of fires.* The ground floor was generally open to the street, and formed the shop; then, some eight or ten feet above the pavement, came the "solar" or "soller" on its projecting brackets, and sometimes (as in the Custom House) a third storey also. Outside stairs seem to have been common, and sometimes penthouses on pillars or cellar steps further broke the monotony of the street, though frequent enactments strove to regulate these in the public interest. Of comfort or privacy in the modern sense these houses had little to offer. The living rooms were frequently limited to hall and bower (*i.e.* bedroom); only the better sort had two chambers; glass was rare; in Paris, which was at least as well-built as London, a well-to-do citizen might well have windows of oiled linen for his bedroom, and even in 1575 a good-sized house at Sheffield contained only sixteen feet of glass altogether.† Meanwhile the wooden shutters which did duty for casements were naturally full of chinks; and the inhabitants were exposed during dark nights not only to the nuisance and danger of "common listeners at the eaves," against whom medieval town legislation is deservedly severe, but also to the far greater chances of burglary afforded by the frailty of their habitations. It is not infrequently recorded in medieval inquests that the housebreaker found his line of least resistance not through a window or a door, but through the wall itself.‡ Moreover, in

* This was at least the theoretical provision of the regulation of 1189, known as Fitz Alwyne's Assize, which is fully summarized and annotated in the "Liber Albus," ed. Riley (R.S.), pp. xxx. ff. We know, however, that similar decrees against roofs of thatch or wooden shingles were not always obeyed.

† "Menagier de Paris," i., 173; Addy, "Evolution of English House," p. 108; cf. "Piers Plowman's Creed," i., 214.

‡ An earthen wall is mentioned in Riley, p. 30. The slight structure of the ordinary house appears from the fact that the rioters of 1381 tore so many down, and that the great storm of 1362 unroofed them wholesale. (Walsingham, an. 1381, and Riley, p. 308.) Compare the hook with wooden handle and two ropes which was kept in each ward for the pulling down of burning houses. ("Liber Albus," p. xxxiv.)

those unlighted streets, much that was most picturesque by day was most dangerous at night, from the projecting staircases and penthouses down to doorways unlawfully opened after curfew, wherein "aspyers" might lurk, "waiting men for to beaten or to slayen." These and many similar considerations will serve to explain why night-walking was treated in medieval towns as an offence presumptively no less criminal than, in our days, the illegal possession of dynamite. The 15th-century statutes of Oxford condemn the nocturnal wanderer to a fine double that which he would have incurred by shooting at a proctor and his attendants with intent to injure.*

But to return to the inside of the houses. The contract for a well-to-do citizen's dwelling of 1308 has been preserved, by a fortunate chance, in one of the city Letter-books. "Simon de Canterbury, carpenter, came before the Mayor and Aldermen . . . and acknowledged that he would make at his own proper charges, down to the locks, for William de Hanigtone, skinner, before the Feast of Easter then next ensuing, a hall and a room with a chimney, and one larder between the said hall and room; and one solar over the room and larder; also, one oriel at the end of the hall, beyond the high bench, and one step with a porch from the ground to the door of the hall aforesaid, outside of that hall; and two enclosures as cellars, opposite to each other, beneath the hall; and one enclosure for a sewer, with two pipes leading to the said sewer; and one stable, [*blank*] in length, between the said hall and the old kitchen, and twelve feet in width, with a solar above such stable, and a garret above the solar aforesaid; and at one end of such solar, there is to be a kitchen with a chimney; and there is to be an oriel between the said hall and the old chamber, eight feet in width. . . . And the said William

* Cooper, "Annals of Cambridge," an. 1445; Rashdall, "Universities of Europe," ii., 413. Cf. the "common nightwalkers" and "roarers" in Riley, pp. 86 ff.

de Hanigtone acknowledged that he was bound to pay to Simon before-mentioned, for the work aforesaid, the sum of £9 5*s.* 4*d.* sterling, half a hundred of Eastern martenskins, fur for a woman's head, value five shillings, and fur for a robe of him, the said Simon, etc."* Read side by side with this the list of another fairly well-to-do citizen's furniture in 1337. Hugh le Benere, a Vintner who owned several tenements, was accused of having murdered Alice his wife.† He refused to plead, was condemned to prison for life, and his goods were inventoried. Omitting the stock-in-trade of six casks of wine (valued at six marks), the wearing apparel, and the helmet and quilted doublet in which Hugh had to turn out for the general muster, the whole furniture was as follows: "One mattress, value 4*s.*; 6 blankets and one serge, 13*s.* 6*d.*; one green carpet, 2*s.*; one torn coverlet, with shields of sendal, 4*s.*; . . . 7 linen sheets, 5*s.*; one table-cloth, 2*s.*; 3 table-cloths, 18*d.*; . . . one canvas, 8*d.*; 3 feather beds, 8*s.*; 5 cushions, 6*d.*; . . . 3 brass pots, 12*s.*; one brass pot, 6*s.*; 2 pairs of brass pots, 2*s.* 6*d.*; one brass pot, broken, 2*s.* 6*d.*; one candlestick of latten, and one plate, with one small brass plate, 2*s.*; 2 pieces of lead, 6*d.*; one grate, 3*d.*; 2 andirons, 18*d.*; 2 basins, with one washing vessel, 5*s.*; one iron grating, 12*d.*; one tripod, 2*d.*; . . . one iron spit, 3*d.*; one frying-pan, 1*d.*; . . . one funnel, 1*d.*; one small canvas bag, 1*d.*; . . . one old linen sheet, 1*d.*; 2 pillows, 3*d.*; . . . one counter, 4*s.*; 2 coffers, 8*d.*; 2 curtains, 8*d.*; 2 remnants of cloth, 1*d.*; 6 chests, 10*s.* 10*d.*; one folding table, 12*d.*; 2 chairs, 8*d.*; one

* Riley, p. 65. See the specifications for some three-storied houses of a century later quoted by Besant. "Medieval London," i., 250. The furs here specified may well have come to £3 or £4 more (see Rogers, "Agriculture and Prices," pp. 536 ff.). The fur for an Oxford warden's gown varied from 26*s.* 8*d.* to 83*s.*

† Besant, *loc. cit.*, i., 257, mistakenly calls Hugh a "craftsman," and gives from his imagination a quite untrustworthy description of the inquest, the house, and the shop. He had evidently not seen the supplementary notice in Sharpe's "Letter Book," F.

portable cupboard, *6d.*; 2 tubs, *2s.*; also firewood, sold for *3s.*; one mazer cup, *6s.*; . . . one cup called "note" (*i.e.* cocoanut) with a foot and cover of silver, value *30s.*; 6 silver spoons, *6s.*" *

This implies no very high standard of domestic comfort. The hall, it must be remembered, had no chimney in the modern sense, but a hole in the roof to which the smoke went up from an open hearth in the centre of the room, more or less assisted in most cases by a funnel-shaped erection of lath and plaster.† It is not generally realized what draughts our ancestors were obliged to accept as unavoidable, even when they sat partially screened by their high-backed seats, as in old inn kitchens. A man needed his warmest furs still more for sitting indoors than for walking abroad; and to Montaigne, even in 1580, one of the most remarkable things in Switzerland was the draughtless comfort of the stove-warmed rooms. "One neither burns one's face nor one's boots, and one escapes the smoke of French houses. Moreover, whereas we [in France] take our warm and furred *robes de chambre* when we enter the house, they on the contrary dress in their doublets, with their heads uncovered to the very hair, and put on their warm clothes to walk in the open air." ‡ The important part played by furs of all kinds, and the matter-of-course mention of dirt and vermin, are among the first things that strike us in medieval literature.

* Riley, p. 199; cf. Sharpe, "Letter Books," F, pp. 19, 113. A list of furniture left by a richer citizen, apparently incomplete, is given in Riley, p. 123, and another on p. 283, but this is difficult to separate with certainty from his stock-in-trade. The inventory of a well-to-do Norman peasant-farmer is given by S. Luce, "Du Guesclin," p. 51. Here the strictly domestic items are only "four frying-pans, two metal pots, four chests, three caskets, two feather-beds, three tables, a bedstead, an iron shovel, a gridiron, a [trough?], and a lantern." This was in 1333.

† Addy, "Evolution of English House," pp. 112 ff. "A chamber with a chimney" was the acme of medieval comfort. "P. Plowman," B., x., p. 98, and "Crede," 209.

‡ "Œuvres," ed. Buchon, p. 646. A century later, Thomas Elwood's Memoirs show that an English squire's family needed their warm caps as much indoors as outside.

But the worst discomfort of the house, to the modern mind, was the want of privacy. There was generally but one bedroom; for most of the household the house meant simply the hall; and some of those with whom the rest were brought into such close contact might indeed be "gey ill to live wi'." * We have seen that, even as a King's squire, Chaucer had not a bed to himself; and sometimes one bed had to accommodate three occupants. This was so ordered, for instance, by the 15th-century statutes of the choir-school at Wells, which provided minutely for the packing: "two smaller boys with their heads to the head of the bed, and an older one with his head to the foot of the bed and his feet between the others' heads." A distinguished theologian of the same century, narrating a ghost-story of his own, begins quite naturally: "When I was a youth, and lay in a square chamber, which had only a single door well shut from within, together with three more companions in the same bed. . . ." One of these, we presently find, "was of greater age, and a man of some experience." † The upper classes of Chaucer's later days had indeed begun to introduce revolutionary changes into the old-fashioned common life of the hall; a generation of unparalleled success in war and commerce was already making possible, and therefore inevitable, a new cleavage between class and class. The author of the B. text of "Piers Plowman," writing about 1377, complains of these new and unsociable ways (x., 94).

> "Ailing is the Hall each day in the week,
> Where the lord nor the lady liketh not to sit.
> Now hath each rich man a rule to eaten by himself
> In a privy parlour, for poor men's sake,
> Or in a chamber with a chimney, and leave the chief Hall,
> That was made for meals, and men to eaten in."

* Cf. the affair in the hall of Wolsingham Rectory in 1370. Raine, "Auckland Castle," p. 38.

† A. F. Leach, "English Schools before the Reformation," p. 10; "Dame Alice Kyteler" (Camden Soc.), introd., p. xxxix. The choir-boys, it may be noted in passing, had only half an hour of playtime daily.

Few men, however, could afford even these rudiments of privacy; people like Chaucer, of fair income and good social position, still found in their homes many of the discomforts of shipboard; and their daily intercourse with their fellow-men bred the same blunt familiarity, even beneath the most ceremonious outward fashions. It was not only starveling dependents like Lippo Lippi, whose daily life compelled them to study night and day the faces and outward ways of their fellow-men.

But let us get back again into the street, where all the work and play of London was as visible to the passer-by as that of any colony of working ants under the glass cases in a modern exhibition. Often, of course, there were set pageants for edification or distraction—Miracle Plays and solemn church processions twice or thrice in the year,—the Mayor's annual ride to the palace of Westminster and back,—the King's return with a new Queen or after a successful campaign, as in 1357, when Edward III. "came over the Bridge and through the City of London, with the King of France and other prisoners of rich ransom in his train. He entered the city about tierce [9 a.m.] and made for Westminster; but at the news of his coming so great a crowd of folk ran together to see this marvellous sight, that for the press of the people he could scarce reach his palace after noonday." Frequent again were the royal tournaments at Smithfield, Cheapside, and Westminster, or "trials by battle" in those same lists, when one gentleman had accused another of treachery, and London citizens might see the quarrel decided by God's judgment.* Here were welcome contrasts to the monotony of household life; for there was in all these shows a piquant element of personal risk, or at least of possible broken heads for others. Even if the King threw down his truncheon before the bitter end of the duel, even if

* It is interesting to note that, when Chaucer was Clerk of the Works to Richard II., he superintended the erection of scaffolds for the King and Queen on the occasion of one of these Smithfield tournaments.

no bones were broken at the tournament, something at least would happen amongst the crowd. Fountains ran wine in the morning, and blood was pretty sure to be shed somewhere before night. In 1396, when the little French Princess of eight years was brought to her Royal bridegroom at Westminster, nine persons were crushed to death on London Bridge, and the Prior of Tiptree was among the dead. Even the church processions, as episcopal registers show, ended not infrequently in scuffling, blows, and bloodshed; and the frequent holy days enjoyed then, as since, a sad notoriety for crime. Moreover, these things were not, as with us, mere matters of newspaper knowledge; they stared the passer-by in the face. Chaucer must have heard from his father how the unpopular Bishop Stapledon was torn from his horse at the north door of St. Paul's and beheaded with two of his esquires in Cheapside; how the clergy of the cathedral and of St. Clement's feared to harbour the corpses, which lay naked by the roadside at Temple Bar until "women and wretched poor folk took the Bishop's naked corpse, and a woman gave him an old rag to cover his belly, and they buried him in a waste plot called the Lawless Church, with his squires by his side, all naked and without office of priest or clerk." * Chaucer himself must have seen some of the many similar tragedies in 1381, for they are among the few events of contemporary history which we can definitely trace in his poems—

> Have ye not seen some time a palë face
> Among a press, of him that hath been led
> Toward his death, where as him gat no grace,
> And such a colour in his face hath had,
> Men mightë know his face that was bestead
> Amongës all the faces in that rout? †

What modern Londoner has witnessed this, or anything

* "French Chron. of London" (Camden Soc.), p. 52; cf. Walsingham, an. 1326.

† "C. T.," B., 645.

like it? Yet to all his living readers Chaucer appealed confidently, "Have ye not seen?" Scores of wretched lawyers and jurors were hunted down in that riot, and hurried through the streets to have their heads hacked off at Tower Hill or Cheapside, "and many Flemings lost their head at that time, and namely [specially] they that could not say 'Bread and Cheese,' but 'Case and Brode.'"* It may well have been Simon of Sudbury's white face that haunted Chaucer, when the mob forgot his archbishopric in the unpopularity of his ministry, forgot the sanctity of the chapel at whose altar he had taken refuge, "paid no reverence even to the Lord's Body which the priest held up before him, but worse than demons (who fear and flee Christ's sacrament) dragged him by the arms, by his hood, by different parts of the body towards their fellow-rioters on Tower Hill without the gates. When they had come thither, a most horrible shout arose, not like men's shouts, but worse beyond all comparison than all human cries, and most like to the yelling of devils in hell. Moreover, they cried thus whensoever they beheaded men or tore down their houses, so long as God permitted them to work their iniquity unpunished."† De Quincey has noted how such cries may make a deeper mark on the soul than any visible scene. And here again Chaucer has brought his own experience, though half in jest, as a parallel to the sack of Ilion and Carthage or the burning of Rome—

> So hideous was the noise, *benedicite!*
> Certës, he Jacke Straw, and his meinie
> Ne madë never shoutës half so shrill,
> When that they woulden any Fleming kill . . .‡

Last tragedy of all—but this time, though he may well have seen, the poet could no longer write—Richard II.'s corpse "was brought to St. Paul's in London, and his

* "Chronicles of London," ed. Kingsford, p. 15.
† Walsingham, an. 1381.
‡ "C. T.," B., 4583.

face shown to the people," that they might know he was really dead.*

Nor was there less comedy than tragedy in the London streets; the heads grinned down from the spikes of London Bridge on such daily buffooneries as scarcely survive nowadays except in the amenities of cabdrivers and busmen. The hue and cry after a thief in one of these narrow streets, encumbered with show-benches and goods of every description, must at any time have been a Rabelaisian farce; and still more so when it was the thief who had raised the hue and cry after a true man, and had slipped off himself in the confusion. The crowds who gather in modern towns to see a man in handcuffs led from a dingy van up the dingy court steps would have found a far keener relish in the public punishments which Chaucer saw on his way to and from work; fraudulent tradesmen in the pillory, with their putrid wares burning under their noses, or drinking wry-mouthed the corrupt wine which they had palmed off on the public; scolding wives in the somewhat milder "thewe"; sometimes a penitential procession all round the city, as in the case of the quack doctor and astrologer whose story is so vividly told by the good Monk of St. Alban's. The impostor "was set on a horse [barebacked] with the beast's tail in his hand for a bridle, and two pots which in the vulgar tongue we call *Jordans* bound round his neck, with a whetstone in sign that he earned all this by his lies; and thus he was led round the whole city."† A lay chronicler might have given us the reverse of the medal; some priest barelegged in his shirt, with a lighted taper in his hand, doing penance for his sins before the congregation of his own church. The author of "Piers Plowman" knew this well enough; in introducing us to his tavern company, it is a priest and a parish clerk whom he shows us cheek-by-jowl with the

* "Eulog. Hist.," iii., 387.

† Walsingham, an. 1382; Riley, p. 464.

two least reputable ladies of the party. The whole passage deserves quoting in full as a picture of low life indeed, but one familiar enough to Chaucer and his friends in their day; for it is a matter of common remark that even the distance which separated different classes in earlier days made it easier for them to mix familiarly in public. The very catalogue of this tavern company is a comedy in itself, and may well conclude our survey of common London sights. Glutton, on his way to morning mass, has passed Bett the brewster's open door; and her persuasive "I have good ale, gossip" has broken down all his good resolutions—

Then goeth Glutton in, and great oaths after.
Ciss the seamstress sat on the bench,
Wat the warrener, and his wife drunk,
Tim the tinker, and twain of his knaves,
Hick the hackneyman and Hugh the needler;
Clarice of Cock's Lane, the clerk of the church,
Sir Piers of Prydie and Pernel of Flanders;
An hayward and an hermit, the hangman of Tyburn,
Daw the dyker, with a dozen harlots [rascals
Of porters and pickpurses and pilled tooth-drawers; [bald
A ribiber and a ratter, a raker and his knave [lute-player, scavenger,
A roper and a ridingking, and Rose the disher, [mercenary trooper
Godfrey the garlicmonger and Griffin the Welshman,
And upholders an heap, early by the morrow [furniture-brokers
Give Glutton with glad cheer good ale to hansel.* [try

* "P. Plowman," C., vii., 352 ff. For Clarice and Peronel, see Prof. Skeat's notes, *ad loc.*, and cf. Riley, pp. 484, 566, and note 3.

A TOOTH-DRAWER OF THE 14TH CENTURY, WITH A WREATH OF PAST TROPHIES OVER HIS SHOULDER

(FROM MS. ROY. VI. E. 6 f. 503 b)

CHAPTER VIII

ALDGATE TOWER

"For though the love of books, in a cleric, be honourable in the very nature of the case, yet it hath sorely exposed us to the adverse judgment of many folk, to whom we became an object of wonder, and were blamed at one time for greediness in that matter, or again for seeming vanity, or again, for intemperate delight in letters; yet we cared no more for their revilings than for the barking of curs, contented with His testimony alone to Whom it pertaineth to try the hearts and reins. . . . Yet perchance they would have praised and been kindly affected towards us if we had spent our time in hunting wild beasts, in playing at dice, or in courting ladies' favours."—The "Philobiblon" of Bp. R. de Bury (1287–1345).

EVEN in the 14th century a man's house was more truly his castle in England than in any country of equal population; and Chaucer was particularly fortunate in having secured a city castle for his house. The records show that such leases were commonly granted by the authorities to men of influence and good position in the City; in 1367 the Black Prince specially begged the Mayor that Thomas de Kent might have Cripplegate; and we have curious evidence of the keen competition for Aldgate. The Mayor and Aldermen granted to Chaucer in 1374 "the whole dwelling-house above Aldgate Gate, with the chambers thereon built and a certain cellar beneath the said gate, on the eastern side thereof, together with all its appurtenances, for the lifetime of the said Geoffrey." There was no rent though of course Chaucer had to keep it in repair; in an earlier lease of 1354, the tenant had paid 13*s.* 4*d.* a year besides repairs. The City promised to keep no prisoners in the tower during Chaucer's tenancy,* but

* Newgate, Ludgate, and Cripplegate were regular prisons at this time; but Besant is quite mistaken in saying that all gate-leases provide

naturally stipulated that they might take possession of their gate when necessary for the defence of the City. In 1386, as we have already seen and shall see more fully hereafter, there was a scare of invasion so serious that the authorities can scarcely have failed to take the gates into their own hands for a while. Though this need not necessarily have ended Chaucer's tenancy altogether, yet he must in fact have given it up then, if not earlier; and a Common Council meeting held on October 4 resolved to grant no such leases in future "by reason of divers damages that have befallen the said city, through grants made to many persons, as well of the Gates and the dwelling-houses above them, as of the gardens and vacant places adjoining the walls, gates, and fosses of the said city, whereby great and divers mischiefs may readily hereafter ensue." Yet *on the very next day* (and this is our first notice of the end of Chaucer's tenancy) a fresh lease of Aldgate tower and house was granted to Chaucer's friend Richard Forster by another friend of the poet's, Nicholas Brembre, who was then Mayor. This may very likely have been a pre-arranged job among the three friends; but the flagrant violation of the law may well seem startling even to those who have realized the frequent contrasts between medieval theory and medieval practice; and after this we are quite prepared for Riley's footnote, "Within a very short period after this enactment was made, it came to be utterly disregarded."* The whole transaction, however, shows clearly that the Aldgate lodging was considered a prize in its way.

That Chaucer loved it, we know from one of the too rare autobiographical passages in his poems, describing

"that they may be taken over as prisons if they are wanted" ("Medieval London," i., 163). A Cripplegate lease (Riley, p. 387) has naturally such a provision; the others are silent or (like Chaucer's) definitely promise the contrary.

* P. 489; cf. "Life Records," IV., xxxiv. Michaelmas Day fell in 1386 on a Saturday.

his shy seclusion even more plainly than the Host hints at it in the "Canterbury Tales." The "House of Fame" is a serio-comic poem modelled vaguely on Dante's "Comedia," in which a golden eagle carries Chaucer up to heaven, and, like Beatrice, plays the part of Mentor all the while. The poet, who was at first somewhat startled by the sudden rush through the air, and feared lest he might have been chosen as an unworthy successor to Enoch and Elias, is presently quieted by the Eagle's assurance that this temporary apotheosis is his reward as the Clerk of Love—

> Love holdeth it great humbleness,
> And virtue eke, that thou wilt make
> A-night full oft thy head to ache,
> In thy study so thou writest
> And ever more of Love enditest.

The Ruler of the Gods, therefore, has taken pity on the poet's lonely life—

> That is, that thou hast no tidings
> Of Lovë's folk, if they be glad,
> Nor of nothing ellës that God made:
> And not only from far countree,
> Whence no tiding cometh to thee,
> But of thy very neighëbores
> That dwellen almost at thy doors,
> Thou hearest neither that nor this;
> For, when thy labour done all is,
> And hast y-made thy reckonings,
> Instead of rest and newë things
> Thou go'st home to thy house anon,
> And, all so dumb as any stone,
> Thou sittest at another book
> Till fully dazed is thy look,
> And livest thus as an heremite,
> Although thy abstinence is lite.* [little

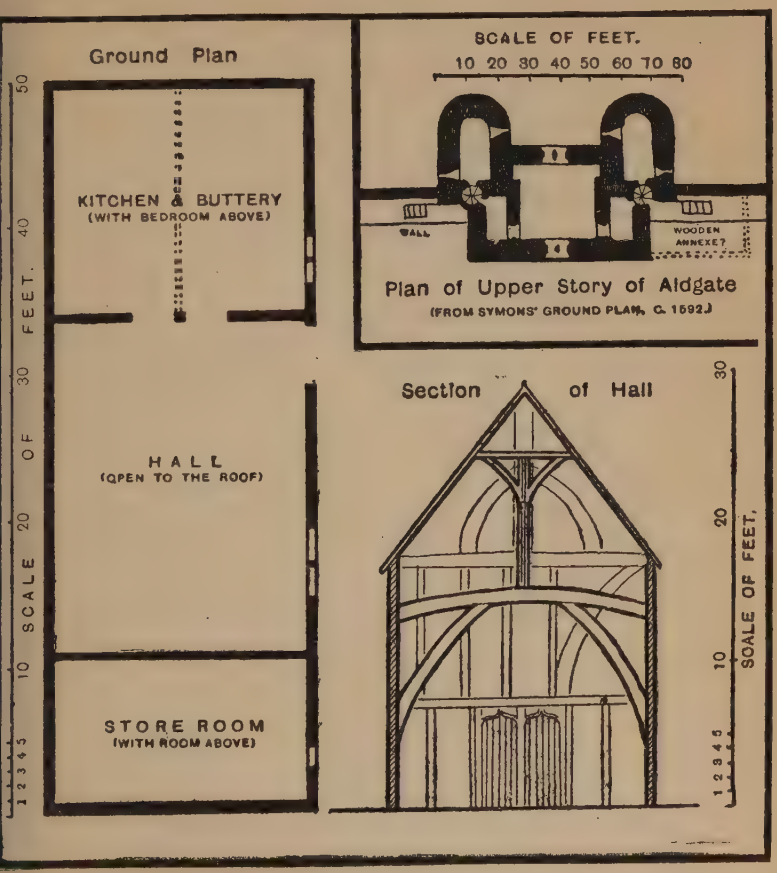
Here we have the central figure of the Aldgate Chamber, but what was the background? Was his room, as some will have it, such as that to which his eyes opened in the "Book of the Duchess"?

* Bk. II., lines 122 ff.

And sooth to say my chamber was
Full well depainted, and with glass
Were all the windows well y-glazed
Full clear, and not one hole y-crazed, [cracked
That to behold it was great joy ;
For wholly all the story of Troy
Was in the glazing y-wrought thus . . .
And all the walls with colours fine
Were painted, bothë text and glose, [commentary
And all the Romance of the Rose.
My windows weren shut each one
And through the glass the sunnë shone
Upon my bed with brightë beams. . . .

Those lines were written before the Aldgate days; and the hints which can be gathered from surviving inventories and similar sources make it very improbable that the poet was lodged with anything like such outward magnificence. The storied glass and the frescoed wall were far more probably a reminiscence from Windsor, or from Chaucer's life with one of the royal dukes; and the furniture of the Aldgate dwelling-house is likely to have resembled in quantity that which we have seen recorded of Hugh le Benere, and in quality the similar but more valuable stock of Richard de Blountesham. (Riley, p. 123.) Richard possessed bedding for three beds to the total value of fifty shillings and eightpence; his brass pot weighed sixty-seven pounds; and, over and above his pewter plates, dishes, and salt-cellars, he possessed "three silver cups, ten shillings in weight." Three better cups than these, at least, stood in the Chaucer cupboard; for on New Year's Day, 1380, 1381, and 1382, the accounts of the Duchy of Lancaster record presents from John of Gaunt to Philippa Chaucer of silver-gilt cups with covers. The first of these weighed thirty-one shillings, and cost nearly three pounds; the second and third were apparently rather more valuable. We must suppose, therefore, that the Aldgate rooms were handsomely furnished, as a London citizen's rooms went; but we must beware here of such exaggerations as the genius of William Morris has

popularized. The assumption that the poet knew familiarly every book from which he quotes has long been exploded; and it is quite as unsafe to suppose that



1. GROUND PLAN AND SECTION OF THE CLERGY-HOUSE AT ALFRISTON —A TYPICAL TIMBER HOUSE OF THE 14TH CENTURY. (For the Hall, see Chaucer's "Miller's Tale")

2. PLAN OF ALDGATE TOWER AS IT WAS IN CHAUCER'S TIME

the artistic glories which he so often describes formed part of his home life. There were tapestries and stained glass in churches for every man to see, and in palaces and castles for the enjoyment of the few;

but they become fairly frequent in citizens' houses only in the century after Chaucer's death; and it was very easy to spend an income such as his without the aid of artistic extravagance. Froissart, whose circumstances were so nearly the same, and who, though a priest, was just as little given to abstinence, confesses to having spent 2000 livres (or some £8000 modern English money) in twenty-five years, over and above his fat living of Lestinnes. "And yet I hoard no grain in my barns, I build no churches, or clocks, or ships, or galleys, or manor-houses. I spend not my money on furnishing fine rooms . . . My chronicles indeed have cost me a good seven hundred livres, at the least, and the taverners of Lestinnes have had a good five hundred more." * Froissart's confession introduces a witty poetical plea for fresh contributions; and if Chaucer had added a couple of similar stanzas to the "Complaint to his Empty Purse," it is probable that their tenor would have been much the same: "Books, and the Taverner; and I've had my money's worth from both!"

Professor Lounsbury ("Studies in Chaucer," chap. v.) has discoursed exhaustively, and very judicially, on Chaucer's learning; he shows clearly what books the poet knew only as nodding acquaintances, and how many others he must at one time have possessed, or at least have had at hand for serious study; and it would be impertinent to go back here over the same ground. But Professor Lounsbury is less clear on the subject which most concerns us here—the average price of books; for the three volumes which he instances from the King's library were no doubt illuminated, and he follows Devon in the obvious slip of describing the French Bible as "written in the *Gaelic* language." (II., 196; the reference to Devon should be p. 213, not 218.) But, at the lowest possible estimate, books were certainly an item which would have swelled any budget seriously in the 14th century. This was indeed grossly

* Darmesteter, "Froissart," p. 112.

overstated by Robertson and other writers of a century ago; but Maitland's "Dark Ages," while correcting their exaggerations, is itself calculated to mislead in the other direction. A small Bible was cheap at forty shillings, *i.e.* the equivalent of £30 in modern money; so that the twenty volumes of Aristotle which Chaucer's Clerk of Oxford had at his bed's head could scarcely have failed to cost him the value of three average citizens' houses in a great town.* Among all the church dignitaries whose wills are recorded in Bishop Stafford's Register at Exeter (1395–1419) the largest library mentioned is only of fourteen volumes. The sixty testators include a Dean, two Archdeacons, twenty Canons or Prebendaries, thirteen Rectors, six Vicars, and eighteen layfolk, mostly rich people. The whole sixty apparently possessed only two Bibles between them, and only one hundred and thirty-eight books altogether; or, omitting church service-books, only sixty; *i.e.* exactly one each on an average. Thirteen of the beneficed clergy were altogether bookless, though several of them possessed the *baselard* or dagger which church councils had forbidden in vain for centuries past; four more had only their Breviary. Of the laity fifteen were bookless, while three had service-books, one of these being a knight, who simply bequeathed them as part of the furniture of his private chapel. Any similar collection of wills and inventories would (I believe) give the same results, which fully agree with the independent evidence of contemporary writers. Bishop Richard de Bury (or possibly the distinguished theologian, Holcot, writing in his name) speaks bitterly of the neglect of books in the 14th century. Not only (he says) is the ardent collector ridiculed, but even education is despised, and money rules the world. Laymen, who do not even care whether books lie straight or upside down, are utterly unworthy

* Riley, pp. 194, 285, 338; cf. Mr. W. Hudson's "Parish of St. Peter Permountergate" (Norwich, 1889), pp. 21, 45, 60.

of all communion with them; the secular clergy neglect them; the monastic clergy (with honourable exceptions among the friars) pamper their bodies and leave their books amid the dust and rubbish, till they become "corrupt and abominable, breeding-grounds for mice, riddled with worm-holes." Even when in use, they have a score of deadly enemies—dirty and careless readers (whose various peculiarities the good Bishop describes in language of Biblical directness)—children who cry for and slobber over the illuminated capitals—and careless or slovenly servants. But the deadliest of all such enemies is the priest's concubine, who finds the neglected volume half-hidden under cobwebs, and barters it for female finery. There is an obvious element of exaggeration in the good Bishop's satire; but the Oxford Chancellor, Gascoigne, a century later, speaks equally strongly of the neglect of writing and the destruction of literature in the monasteries of his time; and there is abundant official evidence to prove that our ancestors did not atone for natural disadvantages by any excessive zeal in the multiplication, use, or preservation of books.*

Chaucer was scarcely born when the "Philobiblon" was written; and already in his day there was a growing number of leisured laymen who did know the top end of a book from the bottom, and who cared to read and write something beyond money accounts. Gower, who probably made money as a London merchant before he became a country squire, was also a well-read man; but systematic readers were still very rare outside the Universities, and Mrs. Green writes, even of a later generation of English citizens, "So far as we know, no trader or burgher possessed a library." † Twenty-nine years after Chaucer's death, the celebrated Whittington did indeed found a library; yet this was placed not at

* Cf. the present writer's "From St. Francis to Dante," 2nd ed., pp. 6, 160, 167, 380, where proof is adduced from episcopal registers that even large and rich monasteries had often no scriptorium, and many monks could not write their own names.

† "Town Life," ii., 84.

ALDGATE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS AS RECONSTITUTED IN W. NEWTON'S "LONDON IN THE OLDEN TIME"

12. ST. MICHAEL'S, ALDGATE; 25. BLANCH APPLETON; 26. ST. CATHERINE, COLEMAN STREET; 27. NORTHUMBERLAND HOUSE;

the Guildhall, to which he was a considerable benefactor, but in the Greyfriars' convent. The poet's bookishness would therefore inevitably have made him something of a recluse, and we have no reason to tax his own description with exaggeration.

London has never been a silent city, but Chaucer enjoyed at least one of the quietest spots in it. If (as we have every reason to suppose) the Ordinance of 1345 was far from putting an end to the nuisances which it indicates, then Chaucer must have heaved a sigh of relief when he had seen the Custom-House locked up, and turned his back on Spurrier Lane. The Spurriers were addicted to working after dark for nefarious ends of their own; "and further, many of the said trade are wandering about all day, without working at all at their trade; and then, when they have become drunk and frantic, they take to their work, to the annoyance of the sick and of all their neighbourhood, as well as by reason of the broils that arise between them and the strange folks who are dwelling among them. And then they blow up their fires so vigorously, that their forges begin all at once to blaze, to the great peril of themselves and of all the neighbourhood around. And then too, all the neighbours are much in dread of the sparks, which so vigorously issue forth in all directions from the mouths of the chimneys in their forges."* We may trust that no such offensive handiwork was carried on round Aldgate, whither the poet would arrive about five o'clock in the evening, and sit down forthwith to supper, as the sun began to slant over the open fields. We may hope, at least, that he was wont to sup at home rather than at those alluring cook-shops which alternated with wine-taverns along the river bank; and that, as he "defyed the roast" with his Gascon wine, Philippa sat and sipped with him from one of time-honoured Lancaster's silver-gilt cups. Even if we accept the

* Riley, p. 226. Cf. the similar complaint of a poet against blacksmiths in "Reliquiæ Antiquæ," i., 240.

most pessimistic theories of Chaucer's married life, we need scarcely doubt that the pair sat often together at their open window in the twilight—

> Both of one mind, as married people use,
> Quietly, quietly the evening through.

The sun goes down, a common greyness silvers everything; Epping Forest and the Hampstead heights stand dim against the afterglow. From beneath their very windows the long road stretches far into the fading landscape; men and cattle begin to straggle citywards, first slowly, and then with such haste as their weariness will permit, for the curfew begins to ring out from Bow steeple.* Chaucer himself has painted this twilight scene in "Troilus and Criseyde," written during this very Aldgate time. The hero watches all day long, with his friend Pandarus, at one of the gates of Troy, for had not Criseyde pledged her word to come back on that day at latest? Every creature crawling along the distant roads gives the lover fresh hopes and fresh heart-sickness; but it is sorest of all when the evening shadows leave most to the imagination—

> The day go'th fast, and after that com'th eve
> And yet came not to Troilus Criseyde.
> He looketh forth by hedge, by tree, by greve, [grove
> And far his head over the wall he laid . . .
> "Have here my truth, I see her! Yond she is!
> Have up thine eyen, man! May'st thou not see?"
> Pandarus answered, "Nay, so mote I the!
> All wrong, by God! What say'st thou, man? Where art?
> That I see yond is but a farë-cart."
> The warden of the gatës gan to call
> The folk which that without the gatës were,
> And bade them driven in their beastës all,
> Or all the night they musten bleven there; [remain
> And far within the night, with many a tear,
> This Troilus gan homeward for to ride,
> For well he seeth it helpeth nought t' abide.

* Nominally, the great gate was shut at the hour of sunset, and only the wicket-gate left open till curfew; but regulations of this kind were generally interpreted with a good deal of laxity.

And far within the night, while the "uncunning porters" sing over their liquor or snore on their pallets, Chaucer turns and returns the leaves of Virgil or Ovid, of Dante or the "Romance of the Rose." Does he not also, to poor Philippa's disgust, "laugh full fast" to himself sometimes over that witty and ungallant book of satires which contains "of wicked wives . . . more legendës and lives than be of goodë wivës in the Bible"? It is difficult to escape from this conviction. His "Wife of Bath" cites the treatises in question too fully and too well to make it probable that Chaucer wrote from mere memory. Remembering this probability, and the practical certainty that, like his contemporaries, Chaucer needed to read aloud for the full comprehension of what he had under his eyes, we shall then find nothing unexpected in his pretty plain allusions to reprisals. Sweet as honey in the mouth, his books proved sometimes bitter in the belly, like that of the Apocalypse. "Late to bed" suits ill with "early to rise," and the poet hints pretty plainly that an imperious and somewhat unsympathetic "Awake, Geoffrey!" was often the first word he heard in the morning. When the Golden Eagle caught the sleeping poet up to heaven—

> At the last to me he spake
> In mannës voice, and said "Awake!
> And be not so aghast, for shame!"
> And called me then by my name
> And, for I should the better abraid [rouse
> Me dreamed, "Awake!" to me he said
> Right in the samë voice and steven [tone
> That useth one I couldë neven; [name
> And with that voice, sooth for to say'n
> My mindë came to me again;
> For it was goodly said to me,
> So it was never wont to be.
>
> "House of Fame," ii., 47.

CHAPTER IX

TOWN AND COUNTRY

"For never to my mind was evening yet
But was far beautifuller than its day."

BROWNING

"Wherefore is the sun red at even? For he goeth toward hell."

("The Master of Oxford's Catechism" (XV. cent.);
"Reliquiæ Antiquæ," i., 232.)

THAT which in Chaucer's day passed for rank "sluggardy a-night" might yet be very early rising by the modern standard; and our poet, sorely as he needed Philippa's shrill alarum, might still have deserved the character given to Turner by one who knew his ways well, "that he had seen the sun rise oftener than all the rest of the Academy put together." It is indeed startling to note how sunrise and sunset have changed places in these five hundred years. When a modern artist waxes poetical about the sunrise, a lady will frankly assure him that it is the saddest sight she has ever seen; to her it spells lassitude and reaction after a long night's dancing. Chaucer and his contemporaries lived more in Turner's mood: "the sun, my dear, that's God!" In the days when a tallow candle cost four times its weight in beefsteak, when wax was mainly reserved for God and His saints, and when you could only warm your hands at the risk of burning your boots and blearing your eyes, then no man could forget his strict dependence on the King of the East. The poets of the Middle Ages seem to have been, in general, as insensible to the melancholy beauties

of sunset as to those of autumn. Leslie Stephen, in the first chapters of his "Playground of Europe," has brought a wealth of illustration and penetrating comment to show how strictly men's ideas of the picturesque are limited by their feelings of comfort; and the medieval mind was even more narrowly confined within its theological limitations. Popular religion was then too often frankly dualistic; to many men, the Devil was a more insistent reality than God; and none doubted that the former had special power over the wilder side of nature. The night, the mountain, and the forest were notoriously haunted; and, though many of the finest monasteries were built in the wildest scenery, this was prompted not by love of nature but by the spirit of mortification. At Sülte, for instance, in the forest of Hildesheim, the blessed Godehard built his monastery beside a well of brackish water, haunted by a demon, "who oft-times affrighted men, women and maidens, by catching them up with him into the air." The sainted Bishop exorcised not only the demon but the salts, so that "many brewers brew therefrom most excellent beer . . . wherefore the Bürgermeister and Councillors grant yearly to our convent a hundred measures of Michaelmas malt, three of which measures are equal in quantity to a herring-barrel." What appealed to the founders of the Chartreuse or Tintern was not the beauty of "these steep woods and lofty cliffs," but their ascetic solitude. When, by the monks' own labours and those of their servants, the fields had become fertile, so that they now found leisure to listen how "the shady valley re-echoes in Spring with the sweet songs of birds," then they felt their forefathers to have been right in "noting fertile and pleasant places as a hindrance to stronger minds."* After all, the earth was cursed for Adam's sake, and even its apparent beauty was that of an apple of Sodom. That which Walther won der Vogelweide sang in his

* Busch, "Lib. Ref.," p. 408; Gilleberti Abbatis, "Tract. Ascet.," VII., ii., § 3.

repentant old age had long been a commonplace with moralists—

> "The world is fair to gaze on, white and green and red,
> But inly foul and black of hue, and dismal as the dead."

Ruskin's famous passage on this subject ("M. P.," iii., 14, 15) is, on the whole, even too favourable to the Middle Ages; but he fails to note two remarkable exceptions. The poet of "Pearl," who probably knew Wales well, describes the mountains with real pleasure; and Gawin Douglas anticipated Burns by venturing to describe winter not only at some length but also with apparent sympathy.* Moreover, Douglas describes a sunset in its different stages with great minuteness of detail and the most evident delight. Dante does indeed once trace in far briefer words the fading of daylight from the sky; but in his two unapproachable sunsets he turns our eyes eastwards rather than westwards, as we listen to the vesper bell, or think of the last quiet rays lingering on Virgil's tomb.† The scenic splendour of a wild twilight seems hardly to have touched him; his soul turns to rest here, while the hardy Scot is still abroad to watch the broken storm-clouds and the afterglow. And if Douglas thus outranges even Dante, he leaves Chaucer and Boccaccio far behind. The freshness and variety of the sunrises in the "Decameron" is equalled only by the bald brevity with which the author despatches eventide, which he connects mainly with supper, a little dancing or music, and bed. It would be equally impossible, I believe, to find a real sunset in Chaucer; Criseyde's "Ywis, it will be night as fast," is quite a characteristic epitaph for the dying day.

On the other hand, however, the medieval sunrise is delightful in its sincerity and variety, even under the disadvantage of constant conventional repetition; and

* See Oskar Dolch, "The Love of Nature in Early English Poetry;" Dresden, 1882.

† "Purg.," xxvi., 4; viii., 1; iii., 25; cf. xvii., 8, 12.

here Chaucer is at his best. He may well have been too bookish to please either his neighbours or her whom Richard de Bury calls "a two-footed beast, more to be shunned (as we have ever taught our disciples) than the asp and the basilisk," yet no poet was ever farther removed from the bookworm. Art he loved, but only next to Nature—

> On bookës for to read I me delight,
> And to them give I faith and full credence,
> And in mine heart have them in reverence
> So heartily, that there is gamë none
> That from my bookës maketh me to go'n
> But it be seldom on the holyday;
> Save, certainly, when that the month of May
> Is comen, and that I hear the fowlës sing,
> And that the flowers 'ginnen for to spring,
> Farewell my book and my devotion!*

Not only was the May-day haunt of Bishop's wood within a mile's walk of Aldgate; but behind, almost under his eyes, stood the "Great Shaft of Cornhill," the tallest of all the city maypoles, which was yearly reared at the junction of Leadenhall Street, Lime Street, and St. Mary Axe, and which gave its name to the church of St. Andrew Undershaft, whose steeple it overtopped. How it hung all year under the pentices of a neighbouring row of houses until the Reformation, and what happened to it then, the reader must find in the pages of Stow.† These May-day festivities, which outdid even the Midsummer bonfires and the Christmas mummings in popularity, were a Christianized survival of ancient Nature-worship. When we remember the cold, the smoke, the crowding and general discomfort of winter days and nights in those picturesque timber houses; when we consider that even in castles and manor-houses men's lives differed from this less in quality than in degree; when we try to imagine especially the monotony of woman's life under these

* "Legend of Good Women," Prol., 30 ff.
† "Survey," ed. Morley, 1893, p. 163.

conditions, doubly bound as she was to the housework and to the eternal spinning-wheel or embroidery-frame, with scarcely any interruptions but the morning Mass and gossip with a few neighbours—only then can we even dimly realize what spring and May-day meant. There was no chance of forgetting, in those days, how directly the brown earth is our foster-mother. Men who had fed on salt meat for three or four months, while even the narrow choice of autumn vegetables had long failed almost altogether, and a few shrivelled apples were alone left of last year's fruit—in that position, men watched the first green buds with the eagerness of a convalescent; and the riot out of doors was proportionate to the constraint of home life. Those antiquaries have recorded only half the truth who wrote regretfully of these dying sports under the growing severity of Puritanism, and they forgot that Puritanism itself was a too successful attempt to realize a thoroughly medieval ideal. Fénelon broke with a tradition of at least four centuries when he protested against the repression of country dances in the so-called interests of religion.* It would be difficult to find a single great preacher or moralist of the later Middle Ages who has a frank word to say in favour of popular dances and similar public merry-makings. Even the parish clergy took part in them only by disobeying the decrees of synods and councils, which they disregarded just as they disregarded similar attempts to regulate their dress, their earnings, and their relations with women. Much excuse can indeed be found for this intolerance in the roughness and licence of medieval popular revels. Not only the Church, but even the civic authorities found themselves obliged to regulate the disorders common at London weddings, while Italian town councils attempted to put down the practice of throwing on these occasions

* "Monsieur le curé, . . . ne dansons pas; mais permettons à ces pauvres gens de danser. Pourqoui les empêcher d'oublier un moment qu'ils sont malheureux?"

snow, sawdust, and street-sweepings, which sometimes did duty for the modern rice and old shoes; and members of the Third Order of St. Francis were strictly forbidden to attend either weddings or dances.* These and other similar considerations, which the reader will supply for himself, explain the otherwise inexplicable severity of all rules for female deportment in the streets. "If any man speak to thee," writes the Good Wife for her Daughter, "swiftly thou him greet; let him go by the way"; and again—

> "Go not to the wrestling, nor to shooting at the cock
> As it were a strumpet, or a giggëlot,
> Stay at home, daughter."

"When thou goest into town or to church," says the author of the "Ménagier de Paris" to his young wife, "walk with thine head high, thine eyelids lowered and fixed on the ground at four fathoms distance straight in front of thee, without looking or glancing sideways at either man or woman to the right hand or the left, nor looking upwards." Even Chaucer tells us of his Virginia—

> She hath full oftentimës sick her feigned,
> For that she wouldë flee the companye
> Where likely was to treaten of follye—
> As is at feastës, revels, and at dances,
> That be occasions of dalliances.†

These, of course, were exaggerations bred of a general roughness beyond all modern experience. Even Christmas mumming was treated as an objectionable practice in London; as early as 1370 we find the first of a series of Christmastide proclamations "that no one shall go in the streets of the city, or suburbs thereof, with visor or mask . . . under penalty of imprisonment." Similarly severe measures were threatened against

* Riley, 571. I have dealt fully with this subject in my "Medieval Studies," Nos. 3 and 4.

† "Babees Book," E.E.T.S., p. 40; "Ménagier de Paris," i., 15; "C. T.," C., 62.

football in the streets, against the game of "taking off

MEDIEVAL MUMMERS. (From Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes")

the hoods of people, or laying hands on them," and

against "hocking" or extorting violent contributions from passers-by on the third Monday or Tuesday after Easter. But the very frequency of the prohibitions is suggestive of their inefficiency; and in 1418 the City authorities were still despairingly "charging on the King's behalf and his City, that no man or person . . . during this holy time of Christmas be so hardy in any wise to walk by night in any manner mumming plays, interludes, or any other disguisings with any feigned beards, painted visors, deformed or coloured visages in any wise, upon pain of imprisonment of their bodies and making fine after the discretion of the Mayor and Aldermen."* Much of this mumming was not only pagan in its origin but still in its essence definitely anti-ecclesiastical. When, as was constantly the case, the clergy joined in the revels, this was a more or less conscious protest against the Puritan and ascetic ideal of their profession. The rule of life for Benedictine nuns, to which even the Poor Clares were subjected after a very brief career of more apostolic liberty, cannot be read in modern times without a shudder of pity. Not only did the authorities attempt to suppress all natural enjoyment of life—even Madame Eglantyne's lapdogs were definitely contraband—but the girls were trammelled at every turn with the minutely ingenious and degrading precautions of an oriental harem. That was the theory, the ideal; yet in fact these convent churches provided a common theatre, if not the commonest, for the riotous and often obscene licence of the Feast of Fools. To understand the wilder side of medieval life, it is absolutely necessary to bear in mind the pitiless and unreal "other-worldliness" of the ascetic ideal; just as we can best explain certain of Chaucer's least edifying tales by referring, on the other hand, to the almost idolatrous exaggerations of his "A.B.C."

* Sharpe's "Letter Book" G., pp. 274, 303; Riley, pp. 269, 534, 561, 571, 669. In the country, "hocking" was often resorted to for raising church funds. See Sir John Phear's "Molland Accounts" (Devonshire Assn., 1903), pp. 198 ff.

But, however he may have revelled with the rest in his wilder youth, the elvish and retiring poet of the "Canterbury Tales" mentions the sports of the townsfolk only with gentle irony. "Merry Absolon," the parish clerk, who played so prominent a part in street plays, who could dance so well "after the school of Oxenford . . . and with his leggës casten to and fro," and who was at all points such a perfect beau of the 'prentice class to which he essentially belonged—all these small perfections are enumerated only that we may plumb more accurately the depths to which he is brought by woman's guile. The May-dance was probably as external to Chaucer as the Florentine carnival to Browning. While a thousand Absolons were casting to and fro with their legs, in company with a thousand like-minded giggëlots, around the Great Shaft of Cornhill, Chaucer had slipped out into the country. Many other townsfolk came out into the fields—young men and maidens, old men and children—but Chaucer tells us how he knelt by himself, worshipping the daisy as it opened to the sun—

> Upon the smallë softë sweetë grass,
> That was with flowrës sweet embroidered all.

At another time we listen with him to the leaves rustling in undertone with the birds—

> A wind, so small it scarcely might be less,
> Made in the leavës green a noisë soft,
> Accordant to the fowlës' song aloft.

Or watch the queen of flowers blushing in the sun—

> Right as the freshë, reddë rosë new
> Against the Summer sunnë coloured is!

But for the daisy he has a love so tender, so intimate, that it is difficult not to suspect under the flower some unknown Marguerite of flesh and blood—

> . . . of all the flowers in the mead
> Then love I most these flowers white and red

Such as men callen daisies in our town.
To them I have so great affectioun,
As I said erst, when comen is the May,
That in my bed there dawneth me no day
But I am up and walking in the mead,
To see this flower against the sunnë spread; . . .
As she that is of allë flowers flower,
Fulfillèd of all virtue and honour,
And ever y-like fair and fresh of hue.
And I love it, and ever y-like new,
And ever shall, till that mine heartë die. . . .
I fell asleep; within an hour or two
Me dreamèd how I lay in the meadow tho [then
To see this flower that I love so and dread;
And from afar came walking in the mead
The God of Love, and in his hand a Queen,
And she was clad in royal habit green;
A fret of gold she haddë next her hair,
And upon that a whitë crown she bare
With fleurons smallë, and I shall not lie,
For all the world right as a daÿsye
Y-crowned is with whitë leavës lite,
So were the fleurons of her coroune white;
For of one pearlë, fine, oriental
Her whitë coroune was y-maked all.

Pictures like these, in their directness and simplicity, show more loving nature-knowledge than pages of word-painting; and, if they are not only essentially decorative but even somewhat conventional, those are qualities almost inseparable from the art of the time. It is less strange that Chaucer's sunrises should bear a certain resemblance to other sunrises, than that his men and women should be so strikingly individual. Yet, even so, compare two or three of his sunrises together, and see how great is their variety in uniformity. Take, for instance, "Canterbury Tales," A., 1491, 2209, and F., 360; or, again, A., 1033 and "Book of Duchess," 291, where Chaucer describes nature and art in one breath, and each heightens the effect of the other. With all his love of palaces and walled gardens, though he revels in feudal magnificence and glow of colour and elaboration of form, he is already thoroughly modern in his love of

common things.* Here he has no equal until Wordsworth; it has been truly remarked that he is one of the few poets whom Wordsworth constantly studied, and one of the very few to whom he felt and confessed inferiority. Chaucer's triumph of artistic simplicity is the Nun's Priest's tale. The old woman, her daughter, their smoky cottage and tiny garden; the hens bathing in the dust while their lord and master preens himself in the sun; the commotion when the fox runs away with Chanticleer—all these things are described in truly Virgilian sympathy with modest country life. What poet before him has made us feel how glorious a part of God's creation is even a barn-door cock?

> His voice was merrier than the merry orgon
> On massë-days that in the churchë go'n . . .
> His comb was redder than the fine coral,
> Embattled as it were a castle wall;
> His bill was black, and like the jet it shone,
> Like azure were his leggës and his toen;
> His nailës whiter than the lily flower,
> And like the burnished gold was his colour!

Nothing but Chaucer's directness of observation and truth of colouring could have kept his work as fresh as it is. Like Memling and the Van Eycks, he has all the reverence of the centuries with all the gloss of youth. The peculiar charm of medieval art is its youthfulness and freshness; and no poet is richer in those qualities than he.

In this, of course, he reflects his environment. Although London was already becoming in a manner cockneyfied; although she already imported sea-coal from Newcastle, and her purveyors scoured half England for food, and her cattle sometimes came from as far as Nottingham, and most of her bread was baked at Stratford, yet she still bore many traces of the ruralism which so astonishes the modern student in

* Cf. "C. T.," E., 2029; F., 908; "Parl. Foules," 121. For his personal love of trees, etc., see "C. T.," A., 2920; "Parl. Foules," 175, 201, 442.

medieval city life. Even towns like Oxford and Cambridge were rather collections of agriculturalists co-operating for trade and protection than a conglomeration of citizens in the modern sense; and the University Long Vacation is a survival from the days when students helped in the hay and corn harvests. And, greatly as London was already congested in comparison with other English cities, there was as yet no real divorce between town and country. Her population of about 40,000 was nearly four times as great as that of any other city in the kingdom; but, even in the most crowded quarters, the mass of buildings was not yet sufficient to disguise the natural features of the site. The streets mounted visibly from the river and Fleet Brook to the centre of the city. St. Paul's was plainly set on a hill, and nobody could fail to see the slope from the village of Holborn down the present Gray's Inn Lane, up which (it has lately been argued) Boadicea's chariot once led the charge against the Roman legions. Thames, though even the medieval palate found its water drinkable only "in parts," still ran at low tide over native shingle and mud; the Southwark shore was green with trees; not only monasteries but often private houses had their gardens, and surviving records mention fruit trees as a matter of course.* Outside, there was just a sprinkling of houses for a hundred yards or so beyond each gate, and then an ordinary English rural landscape, rather wild and wooded, indeed, for modern England, but dotted with villages and church towers. Knightsbridge, in those days, was a distant suburb to which most of the slaughter-houses were banished; and the districts of St. James and St. Giles, so different in their later social conditions, both sprang up round leper hospitals in open country. Fitzstephen, writing in the days of Henry II., describes Westminster as two miles from the walls, "but yet conjoined with a continuous suburb.

* Cf. Riley, pp. 7, 116, 228, 280, 382, 487, 498.

On all sides," he continues, "without the houses of the suburb, are the citizens' gardens and orchards, planted with trees, both large, sightly, and adjoining together. On the north side are pastures and plain meadows, with brooks running through them turning watermills with a pleasant noise. Not far off is a great forest, a well-wooded chase, having good covert for harts, bucks, does, boars, and wild bulls. The cornfields are not of a hungry sandy mould, but as the fruitful fields of Asia, yielding plentiful increase and filling the barns with corn. There are near London, on the north side, especial wells in the suburbs, sweet, wholesome, and clear. Amongst which Holy Well, Clerkenwell, and St. Clement's Well are most famous, and most frequented by scholars and youths of the city in summer evenings, when they walk forth to take the air." No doubt in Chaucer's time the suburbs had grown a little, but not much; it is doubtful whether the population of England was greater in 1400 than in 1200 A.D. Eastward from his Aldgate lodgings the eye stretched over the woody flats bordering the Thames. Northwards, beyond the Bishop's Wood in Stepney parish and the fen which stretched up the Lea valley to Tottenham, rose the "Great Forest" of Epping. In a more westerly direction Chaucer might have seen a corner of the moor which gave its name to one of the London gates, and which too often became a dreary swamp for lack of drainage; and, above and beyond, the heaths of Highgate and Hampstead. Riley's "Memorials" contain frequent mention of gardens outside the gates; it was one of these, "a little herber* that I have," in which Chaucer laid the scene of his "Legend of Good Women." These gardens seem to have made a fairly continuous circle round the walls. The richest were towards the west, and made an unbroken strip of embroidery from Ludgate to Westminster. Nearer home, however, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Saffron Hill, and Vine Street,

* "Herbarium," green and shady spot.

Holborn, carry us back to the Earl of Lincoln's twenty carefully-tilled acres of herbs, roses, and orchard-land, or to the still more elaborate paradise belonging to the Bishop and monks of Ely, whose vineyard and rosary and fields of saffron-crocus stretched down the slopes of that pleasant little Hollow-Bourn which trickled into Fleet Brook.* Holborn was then simply the nearest and most suburban of a constellation of villages which clustered round the great city; and, if the reader would picture to himself the open country beyond, let him take for his text that sentence in which Becket's chaplain enumerates the rights of chase enjoyed by the city. "Many citizens," writes Fitzstephen, "do delight themselves in hawks and hounds; for they have liberty of hunting in Middlesex, Hertfordshire, all Chiltern, and in Kent to the water of Cray." The city huntsman was, in those days, a salaried official of some dignity.

So Chaucer, who had at one gate of his house the great city, was on the other side free of such green English fields and lanes as have inspired a company of nature-poets unsurpassed in any language. May we not hope that his companions in the "little herber," or on his wider excursions, were sometimes "the moral Gower" or "the philosophical Strode?" And may we not picture them dining in some country inn, like Izaak Walton and his contemplative fellow-citizens? Chaucer's friend was probably the Ralph Strode of Merton College, a distinguished philosopher and anti-Wycliffite controversialist; and it is noteworthy that a Ralph Strode was also a lawyer and Common Serjeant to the city, where he frequently acted as public prosecutor, and that he received for his services a grant of the house over Aldersgate in the year after Chaucer had entered into Aldgate.† There is no obvious reason to dissociate the city lawyer from the Oxford scholar, who has also been suggested with some probability as the

* Matthew Browne's "Chaucer's England," vol. ii., pp. 248, 252.

† Riley, 388, and *passim*.

author of "Pearl" and other 14th-century poems second only to Chaucer's. However that may be, "the philosophical Strode" must unquestionably have influenced the poet who dedicated to him his "Troilus," and we may read an echo of their converse in Chaucer's own reflections at the end of that poem on Love and Thereafter—

> O youngë freshë folkës, he or she,
> In which that love upgroweth with your age,
> Repair ye home from worldly vanitie,
> And of your heart upcast ye the visage
> To that same God that after His image
> You made; and think that all is but a fair,
> This world, that passeth soon as flowers fair.

But we are wandering, perhaps, too far into the realm of mere suppositions. With or without philosophical converse in the fields, the long day wanes at last; and now—

> When that the sun out of the south 'gan west
> And that this flower 'gan close, and go to rest,
> For darkness of the night, the which she dread,
> Home to mine house full swiftly I me sped
> To go to rêst, and early for to rise.

The curfew is ringing again from Bow Steeple; the throng of citizens grows thicker as they near the gates; inside, the street echoes still with the laughter of apprentices and maids, while sounds of still more uproarious revelry come from the wide tavern doors. Soon, however, in half an hour or so, the streets will be empty; the drinkers will huddle with closed doors round the embers in the hall; and our poet, as he lays his head on the pillow, may well repeat to himself those words of Fitzstephen, which he must surely have read: "The only pests of London are the immoderate drinking of fools, and the frequency of fires."

CHAPTER X

THE LAWS OF LONDON

"Del un Marchant au jour present
L'en parle molt communement,
Il ad noun Triche plein de guile,
Qe pour sercher del orient
Jusques au fin del occident,
N'y ad cité ne bonne vile
U Triche son avoir ne pile.
Triche en Bourdeaux, Triche en Civile,
Triche en Paris achat et vent;
Triche ad ses niefs et sa famile,
Et du richesce plus nobile
Triche ad disz foitz plus q'autre gent.
Triche a Florence et a Venise
Ad son recet et sa franchise,
Si ad a Brugges et a Gant;
A son agard auci s'est mise
La noble Cité sur Tamise,
La quelle Brutus fuist fondant;
Mais Triche la vait confondant."

GOWER, "Mirour," 25273 ff

BUT the picturesque side of things was only the smaller half of Chaucer's life, as it is of ours. We must not be more royalist than the King, or claim more for Chaucer and his England than he himself would ever have dreamed of claiming. That which seems most beautiful and romantic to us was not necessarily so five hundred years ago. The literature of Chivalry, for instance, seems to have touched Chaucer comparatively little: he scarcely mentions it but in more or less open derision. Again, while Ruskin and William Morris seem at times almost tempted to wish themselves back to the 14th century for the sake of its Gothic architecture, Chaucer in his retrospective mood is not

ashamed to yearn for a Golden Age as yet uncorrupted by architects of any description whatever—

> No trumpës for the warrës folk ne knew,
> Nor towers high and wallës round or square . . .
> Yet were no palace chambers, nor no halls ;
> In cavës and in woodës soft and sweet
> Slepten this blessed folk withouten walls.*

No doubt he would as little have chosen seriously to go back to hips and haws as Morris would seriously have wished to live in the Middle Ages. But his words may warn us against over-estimating the picturesque side of his age. The most important is commonly what goes on under the surface; and this was eminently true of Chaucer's native London. When we look closely into the social and political ideals of those motley figures which thronged the streets, we may see there our own modern liberties in the making, and note once more how slowly, yet how surely, the mills of God grind. It was once as hard for a community of a few thousand souls to govern itself as it is now for a nation; and parts of what seem to us the very foundations of civilized society were formerly as uncertain and tentative as Imperial Federation or the International Peace Congress.

The ordinary English town after the Conquest was originally simply part of a feudal estate: a rather denser aggregation than the ordinary village, and therefore rather more conscious of solidarity and power. The householders, by dint of holding more and more together, became increasingly capable of driving collective bargains, and of concentrating their numerical force upon any point at issue. They thus throve better than the isolated peasant; and their growing prosperity made them able to pay heavier dues to their feudal lords, who thus saw a prospect of immediate pecuniary gain in selling fresh liberties to the citizens. This process, which was still in its earlier stages in many towns during Chaucer's lifetime, was, however, already far advanced in

* "Aetas Prima," l. 23 ff.

London, which claimed over other cities a superiority symbolized by the legend of its origin: Brut, the son of Æneas, had founded it, and named it Troynovant, or New Troy. But the city had far more tangible claims to supremacy than this: it had obtained from Henry I. —earlier by nearly a century than any other—the right of electing its own sheriff and justiciar; and from a still earlier time than this it had been almost as important politically as it is now. Mr. Loftie, whose "London" in the "Historic Towns" series gives so clear a view of its political development, shows us the city holding out against Canute long after the rest of the kingdom had been conquered; and making, even after Hastings, such terms with the Conqueror as secured to the citizens their traditional liberties. Even thus early, the city fully exemplified the dignity and enduring power of commerce and industry in an age of undisguised physical force. Its foreign trade was considerable, and foreign settlers numerous. "Already there was trade with the Rhine and the Zuyder Zee; and Norman ships, so far back as the days of Æthelred and even of his father, had brought the wines of the south to London. The [German] emperor's men had already established their stafelhof, or steelyard, and traded under jealous rules and almost monastic discipline, but with such money that to this day 'sterling' stands beside 'real' as an adjective, for the Royal credit was not better than that of the Easterling. Some Germans and Danes who did not belong to the 'Gildhalda Theutonicorum,' as it was called in the 13th century, settled in the city beside the Normans of the Conquest, the Frenchmen mentioned in the charter, and the old English stock of law-worthy citizens." *

The example of generosity set by William was followed more or less closely by all his successors except Matilda, who offended the citizens by suppressing their chief liberties, and owed her final failure mainly to the steady support which they therefore gave

* Loftie, p. 26.

to Stephen. The prosperity of London reacted on many other cities, which were gradually enabled to buy themselves charters after her model. Writing before 1200 A.D., Fitzstephen boasted that London traded "with every nation under heaven"; and Matthew of Westminster, a generation later, gives an even more glowing picture of English commerce; "Could the ships of Tharshish" (he exclaims), "so extolled in Holy Scripture, be compared with thine?" Our fortunate insularity, the happy balance of power between King and barons, and sometimes the wisdom of particular sovereigns, had in fact enabled commerce to thrive so steadily that it was rapidly becoming a great political power. Michelet has painted with some characteristic exaggeration of colour, but most truly in the main, the contrast between English and French commerce in the half-century preceding Chaucer's birth. French sovereigns failed to establish any uniform system of weights and measures, and were themselves responsible for constant tampering with the coinage; they discouraged the Lombards, interfered with the great fairs, placed heavy duties on all goods to be bought or sold, and at one time even formally forbade "all trade with Flanders, Genoa, Italy, and Provence." All roads and waterways were subject to heavy tolls; "robbed like a merchant" became a proverbial saying. Meanwhile, our own Edward I., though he banished the Jews and allowed his commercial policy to fluctuate sadly, if judged by a purely modern standard, yet did much to encourage foreign trade. Edward III. did so consistently; he may, as Hallam says, almost be called the Father of English Commerce; we have seen how he sent Chaucer's father to negotiate with the merchants of Cologne, and our poet himself with those of Genoa. When, in 1364, Charles the Wise proclaimed freedom of trade for all English merchants in France, this was only one of the many points on which he paid to English methods the compliment of close imitation. But, though foreigners

were welcome to the English Government, it was not always so with the English people. Chaucer's grandfather, in 1310, was one of sixteen citizens whose arrest the King commanded on account of "certain outrages and despites" done to the Gascon merchants. The citizens of London specially resented the policy by which Edward III. took foreign traders under his special protection, and absolved them from their share of the city taxes in consideration of the tribute which they paid directly to him.* The Flemings, as we have seen, were massacred wholesale in the rising of 1381; and the Hanse merchants were saved from the same fate only by the strong stone walls of their steelyard. But the most consistently unpopular of these strangers, and the most prosperous, were the Lombards, a designation which included most Italian merchants trading abroad. These, since the expulsion of the Jews, had enjoyed almost a monopoly of usury—a hateful term, which, in the Middle Ages, covered not only legitimate banking, but many other financial operations innocent in themselves and really beneficial to the community.† Usury, though very familiar to the papal court, was fiercely condemned by the Canon Law, which would have rendered impossible all commerce on a large scale, but for the ingrained inconsistency of human nature. "He who taketh usury goeth to hell, and he who taketh none, liveth on the verge of beggary"; so wrote an Italian

* "Letter Book," G., pp. iii. ff., where there is a very interesting case of a Florentine merchant.

† It is easy to understand how Jews themselves came back to England under the guise of Lombards. We know enough, from many other sources, of the evils which followed from the inconsistent efforts to outlaw all takers of interest, to appreciate the truth which underlay the obvious exaggerations of the Commons in their petition to the King in 1376. "There are in our land a very great multitude of Lombards, both brokers and merchants, who serve no purpose but that of ill-doing: moreover, several of those which pass for Lombards are Jews and Saracens and privy spies; and of late they have brought into our land a most grievous vice which it beseems us not to name" ("Rot. Parl.," vol. ii., p. 352, § 58).

contemporary of Chaucer's. But there was always here and there a bolder sinner who frankly accepted his chance of damnation, and who would point to his big belly and fat cheeks with a scoffing "See how the priest's curses shrivel me up!" Preachers might indeed urge that, if the eyes of such an one had been opened, he would have seen how "God had in fact fattened him for everlasting death, like a pig fed up for slaughter"; but there remained many possibilities of evasion. For one open rebel, there were hundreds who quietly compounded with the clergy for their ill-gotten gains. "Usurers' bodies were once buried in the field or in a garden; now they are interred in front of the High Altar in churches"; so writes a great Franciscan preacher. But the friars themselves soon became the worst offenders. Lady Meed in "Piers Plowman"—the incarnation of Illicit Gain—has scarcely come up to London when—

> "Then came there a confessor, coped as a Friar . . .
> Then he absolved her soon, and sithen he said
> 'We have a window a-working, will cost us full high;
> Wouldst thou glaze that gable, and grave therein thy name,
> Sure should thy soul be heaven to have.'"*

In other words, the Canon Law practically compelled the taker of interest to become a villain, as the old penal laws encouraged the thief to commit murder. Gower, if we make a little obvious allowance for a satirist's rhetoric, will show us how ordinary citizens regarded the usurious Lombards.† "They claim to dwell in our land as freely, and with as warm a welcome, as if they had been born and bred amongst us. . . . But

* Benvenuto da Imola, "Comentum," vol. i., p. 579; Etienne de Bourbon, p. 254; Nicole Bozon, pp. 35, 226; "Piers Plowman," B., iii., 38; cf. Gower, "Mirour," 21409.

† "Mirour," 25429 ff., 25237 ff., 25915. Mr. Macaulay remarks that Gower seems to deal more tenderly with his own merchant-class than with other classes of society; but his blame, even with this allowance, is severe.

they meditate in their heart how to rob our silver and gold." They change (he says) their chaff for our corn; they sweep in our good sterling coin so that there is little left in the country. "To-day I see such Lombards come [to London] as menials in mean attire; and before a year is past, by dint of deceit and intrigue, they dress more nobly than the burgesses of our city. . . . It is great shame that our Lords, who ought to keep our laws, should treat our merchants as serfs, and quietly free the hands of strange folk to rob us. But Covetise hath dominion over all things: for bribery makes friends and brings success: that is the custom in my country." Nor "in my country" only, but in other lands too; for the best-known firm of merchants now-a-days is Trick and Co. "Seek from East to the going out of the West, there is no city or good town where Trick does not rob to enrich himself. Trick at Bordeaux, Trick at Seville, Trick at Paris buys and sells; Trick has his ships and servants, and of the noblest riches Trick has ten times more than other folk. At Florence and Venice, Trick has his fortress and freedom of trade; so he has at Bruges and Ghent; under his care too has the noble City on the Thames put herself, which Brutus founded, but which Trick is on the way to confound. . . ." Why not, indeed, in an age in which all the bonds of society are loosed? "One [merchant] told me the other day how, to his mind, that man would have wrought folly who, being able to get the delights of this life, should pass them by: for after this life is over, no man knoweth for truth which way or by what path we go. Thus do the merchants of our present days dispute and say and answer for the most part."

Much of Gower's complaint about Trick might be equally truly applied to any age or community; but much was due also to the growth of large and complicated money transactions, involving considerable speculation on credit. Gower complains that merchants talked of "many thousands" where their fathers had

talked of "scores" or "hundreds"; and he, like Chaucer, describes the dignified trader as affecting considerable outward show to disguise the insecurity of his financial position.* Edward III. set here a Royal example by failing for a million florins, or more than £4,000,000 of modern money, and thus ruining two of the greatest European banking firms, the Bardi and Peruzzi of Florence. Undeterred by similar risks, the de la Poles of Hull undertook to finance the King, and became the first family of great merchant-princes in England. Operations such as these opened a new world of possibilities for commerce—vast stakes on the table, and vast prizes to the winners. Moreover, city politics grew complicated in proportion with city finance. The mass of existing documents shows a continual extension of the Londoner's civic authorities, until the townsfolk were trammeled by a network of byelaws not indeed so elaborate as those of a modern city, but incomparably more hampering and vexatious. On this subject, which is of capital importance for the comprehension of life in Chaucer's time, it would be difficult on the whole to put the facts more clearly than they have already been put by Riley on pp. cix. ff. of his introduction to the "Liber Albus." "Such is a sketch of some few of the leading features of social life within the walls of London in the 13th and 14th centuries. The good old times, whenever else they may have existed, assuredly are not to be looked for in days like these. And yet these were not lawless days; on the contrary, owing in part to the restless spirit of interference which seems to have actuated the lawmakers, and partly to the low and disparaging estimate evidently set by them upon the minds and dispositions of their fellow-men, these were times, the great evil of which was a superfluity of laws both national and local, worse than needless; laws which, while unfortunately they created or protected compara-

* "Mirour," 25813. The emphasis which he lays on carpets and curtains shows how great a luxury they were then considered.

tively few real valuable rights, gave birth to many and grievous wrongs. That the favoured and so-called *free* citizen of London even—despite the extensive privileges in reference to trade which he enjoyed—was in possession of more than the faintest shadow of liberty, can hardly be alleged, if we only call to mind the substance of the pages just submitted to the reader's notice, filled as they are with enactments and ordinances, arbitrary, illiberal, and oppressive: laws, for example, which compelled each citizen,* whether he would or no, to be bail and surety for a neighbour's good behaviour, over whom perhaps it was impossible for him to exercise the slightest control; laws which forbade him to make his market for the day until the purveyors for the King and the great lords of the land had stripped the stalls of all that was choicest and best; laws which forbade him to pass the city walls for the purpose even of meeting his own purchased goods; laws which bound him to deal with certain persons or communities only, or within the precincts only of certain localities; laws which dictated, under severe penalties, what sums, and no more, he was to pay to his servants and artisans; laws which drove his dog out of the streets, while they permitted 'genteel dogs' to roam at large: nay, even more than this, laws which subjected him to domiciliary visits from the city officials on various pleas and pretexts; which compelled him to carry on a trade under heavy penalties, irrespective of the question whether or not it was at his loss; and which occasionally went so far as to lay down rules, at what hours he was to walk in the streets, and incidentally, what he was to eat and what to drink. Viewed individually, laws and ordinances such as these may seem, perhaps, of but trifling moment; but 'trifles make life,' the poet says, and to have lived fettered by numbers of restrictions like these,

* "In justice, however, to these centuries, it must be remarked, that they received the institutions of Frankpledge as an inheritance from Saxon times" (Riley).

must have rendered life irksome in the extreme to a sensitive man, and a burden hard to be borne. Every dark picture, however, has its reverse, and in the legislation even of these gloomy days there are one or two meritorious features to be traced. The labourer, no doubt, so far as disposing of his labour at his own time and option was concerned, was too often treated little better than a slave; but, on the other hand, the price of bread taken into consideration, the wages of his labour appear—at times, at least—to have been regulated on a very fair and liberal scale. The determination, too, steadily evinced by the civic authorities, that every trader should really sell what he professed to sell, and that the poor, whatever their other grievances, should be protected, in their dealings, against the artifices of adulteration, deficient measures, and short weight, is another feature that commands our approval. Greatly deserving, too, of commendation is the pride that was evidently felt by the Londoners of these times in the purity of the waters of their much-loved Thames, and the carefulness with which the civic authorities, in conjunction with the Court, took every possible precaution to preserve its banks from encroachment and its stream from pollution. The fondness, too, of the citizens of London in former times for conduits and public fountains, though based, perhaps, upon absolute necessity, to some extent, is a feature that we miss in their representatives at the present day."

The words about the purity of the Thames need some modification in the light of such incidents as those recorded (for instance) in Mr. Sharpe's calendar of "Letter Book" G, pp. xxvii. ff.;* but the most serious

* "To these writs return was made [in 1354] to the effect that the civic authorities had given orders for butchers to carry the entrails of slaughtered beasts to the Flete and there clean them in the tidal waters of the Thames, instead of throwing them on the pavement by the house of the Grey Friars." Again: "Although this order [of 1369] was carried out and the bridge destroyed, butchers continued to carry offal from the

gap in Riley's picture is the absence of any clear allusion to the almost incredible gulfs which are frequently to be found between 14th-century theory and practice. We have already seen how openly the city officials broke their own brand-new resolution about lodgings over the city gates; and the surviving records of all medieval cities tell the same tale, for which we might indeed be prepared by the wearisome iteration with which we find the same enactments re-enacted again and again, as if they had never been thought of before. As Dean Colet said, when the world of the Middle Ages was at its last gasp, it was not new laws that England needed, but a new spirit of justice in enforcing the old laws. Seldom, indeed, had these become an absolute dead letter—we find them invoked at times where we should least have expected it—but at the very best they were enforced with a barefaced partiality which cannot be paralleled in modern civilized countries even under the most unfavourable circumstances. From Norwich, one of the greatest towns in the kingdom, and certainly not one of the worst governed, we have fortunately surviving a series of Leet Court Rolls, which have been admirably edited by Mr. Hudson for the Selden Society, and commented on more briefly in his "Records of the City of Norwich." * He shows that, whereas the breach of certain civic regulations should nominally have been punished by a fine for the first offence, pillory for the second, and expulsion for the third, yet in fact there was no pretence, in an ordinary way, of taking the law literally. "The price of ale was fixed according to the price of wheat. Almost every housewife of the leading families brewed ale and sold it to her neighbours, and invariably charged more than the fixed price. The authorities evidently expected and wished this course to be taken, for these ladies

shambles to the riverside; and this nuisance had to be suppressed in 1370." But the whole passage should be read in full.

* Vol. I., cxxxviii. ff. and 365 ff.

were regularly presented and amerced every year for the same offence, paid their amercements and went away to go through the same process in the future as in the past. Much the same course was pursued by other trades and occupations. Fishmongers, tanners, poulterers, cooks, etc., are fined wholesale year after year for breaking every by-law that concerned their business. In short, instead of a trader (as now) taking out a license to do his business on certain conditions which he is expected to keep, he was bound by conditions which he was expected to break and afterwards fined for the breach. The same financial result was attained or aimed at by a different method." Moreover, the fines themselves were collected with the strangest irregularity. "Some are excused by the Bailiffs without reason assigned; some 'at the instance' of certain great people wishing to do a good turn for a friend. Again, others make a bargain with the collector, thus expressed, as for instance, 'John de Swaffham is not in tithing. Amercement *2s.* He paid *6d.*, the rest is excused. He is quit.' Sometimes an entry is marked 'vad,' i.e. *vadiat*, or *vadiatur*, 'he gives a pledge,' or, 'it is pledged.' The Collector had seized a jug, or basin, or chair. But by far the larger number of entries are marked 'd,' i.e. *debet*, 'he owes it.' The Collector had got nothing. At the end of each (great) Leet is a collector's account of moneys received and paid in to the Bailiffs or the City Chamberlain in three or four or more payments. By drawing out a balance sheet for the whole city in this year it appears that the total amount of all the amercements entered is £72 18*s.* 10*d.* This is equivalent to more than £1000 at the present value of money. But all that the Collectors can account for, even after Easter, is £17 0*s.* 2*d.* It is clear that however efficient the system was in preventing offences from passing undetected, it did not do much to deter offenders from repeating them."

The enactments, of course, were still there on the

city Statute-book; and, if an example needed to be made of any specially obnoxious tradesman, they might sometimes be enforced in all their theoretical rigour. In general, however, the severity of the written law was scarcely realized but by men with very tender consciences or with very few friends. Forestalling in the market was one of the most heinous of civic offences; yet, while John Doe was dutifully paying his morning orisons, Richard Roe was "out at cockcrow to buy privately when the citizens were at Mass, so that by six o'clock, there was nothing left in the market for the good folk of the town." * Not less heinous was the selling of putrid victuals. Here we do indeed find the theoretical horrors of the pillory inflicted in all their rigour, but not once a year among the 40,000 people of London. † These cannot have been the only offenders, or even an appreciable fraction of them; for Chaucer's sarcasm as to the unwholesome fare provided at cook-shops is borne out even more emphatically by others. Cardinal Jacques de Vitry tells how a customer once pleaded for a reduction in price "because I have bought no flesh but at your shop for these last seven years." "What!" replied the Cook, "for so long a time, and you are yet alive!" The author of "Piers Plowman" exhorts mayors to apply the pillory more strictly to—

> "Brewsters and bakers, butchers and cooks;
> For these are men on this mould that most harm worken
> To the poor people that piece-meal buyen:
> For they poison the people privily and oft . . ."

A lurid commentary on these lines may be found in a presentment of the twelve jurors at the Norwich leet-court. "All the men of Sprowston sell sausages and puddings and knowingly buy measly pigs; and they

* Mrs. Green, "Town Life," ii., 55.

† Between 1347 and 1375, for instance, there are only 23 cases of pillory in all.

sell in Norwich market the aforesaid sausages and pigs, unfit for human bodies." *

This, of course, is only one side of city life: the side of which we catch glimpses nowadays when the veil is lifted at Chicago. Rudimentary and partial as city justice still was in Chaucer's days, overstrained in theory and weak-kneed in practice, it was yet a part of real self-government and of real apprenticeship to higher things in politics, not only civic but national. The constitution of the city was frankly oligarchical, yet the mere fact that the citizens should have a constitution of their own, which they often had to defend against encroachments by brotherly co-operation, by heavy sacrifices of money, or even at the risk of bloodshed—this in itself was the thin end of the democratic wedge in national politics. Rich merchants might, indeed, domineer over their fellow-citizens by naked tyranny and sheer weight of money, which (as 14th-century writers assert in even less qualified terms than those of our own day) controls all things under the sun. But it was these same men who, side by side with their brothers, the country squires,† successfully asserted in Parliament the power of the purse, and the right of asking even the King how he meant to spend the nation's money, before they voted it for his use.

* It is pertinent to note in this connection the medieval custom of giving condemned meat to hospitals. Mr. Wheatley ("London," p. 196) quotes from a Scottish Act of Parliament in 1386, "Gif ony man brings to the market corrupt swine or salmond to be sauld, they sall be taken by the bailie, and incontinent, without ony question, sall be sent to the leper folke; and, gif there be na lepper folke, they sall be destroyed all utterlie." At Oxford in the 15th century, there was a similar regulation providing that putrid or unfit meat and fish should be sent to St. John's Hospital. ("Munimenta Academica" (R.S.), pp. 51, 52). Here is a probable clue to the tradition that medieval apprentices struck against salmon more than twice a week. See *Athenæum*, August 27 and September 3, 1898.

† Besant insists very justly on the blood-kinship between the leading citizens and the country gentry. ("Medieval London," i., 218 ff.) He shows that a very large majority of Mayors, Aldermen, etc., were country-born, and of good family.

Moreover, it was due enormously to London and the great cities that our national liberties were safeguarded from the foreign invader. The considerable advance in national wealth between 1330 and 1430 was partly due to our success in war. While English cities multiplied, French cities had even in many cases to surrender into their King's hands those liberties for which they were now too poor to render the correspondent services. Yet, even before the first blow had been struck, those wars were already half-won by English commerce. "The secret of the battles of Crécy and Poitiers lies in the merchants' counting-houses of London, Bordeaux, and Bruges."* Apart from those habits and qualities which successful commerce implies, the amount of direct supplies in men and money contributed by the English towns during Edward's wars can only be fully realized by reading Dr. Sharpe's admirable prefaces to his "Calendars of Letter-Books." But a single instance is brief and striking enough to be quoted here.

Our crushing defeat by the combined French and Spanish navies off La Rochelle in 1372 lost us the command of the sea until our victory at Cadzand in 1387; and Chaucer's Merchant rightly voiced the crying need of English commerce during that time—

> He would the sea were kept, for any thing,
> Betwixtë Middelburgh and Orëwell.

During those fifteen years the ports of the south coast were constantly harried by privateers. The Isle of Wight was taken and plundered. The Prior of Lewes, heading a hastily raised force against the invaders, was taken prisoner at Rottingdean; and such efforts to clear the seas as were made on our part were not public, but merely civic, or even private. The men of Winchelsea and Rye burned a couple of Norman ports, after plundering the very churches; and the sailors of Portsmouth and Dartmouth collected a fleet

* Michelet, "Hist. de France," l. i., ch. i.

which for a short while swept the Channel. This may be the reason why Chaucer, writing two years later, makes his bold Shipman hail from Dartmouth. But, seven years before this raid, a single London merchant had done still more. A Scottish pirate named Mercer, reinforced by French and Spanish ships, infested the North Sea until "God raised up against him one of the citizens of Troynovant." "John Philpot, citizen of London, a man of great wit, wealth and power, narrowly considering the default or treachery of the Duke of Lancaster and the other Lords who ought to have defended the realm, and pitying his oppressed countrymen, hired with his own money a thousand armed men. . . . And it came to pass that the Almighty, who ever helpeth pious vows, gave success to him and his, so that his men presently took the said Mercer, with all that he had taken by force from Scarborough, and fifteen more Spanish ships laden with much riches. Whereat the whole people exulted . . . and now John Philpot alone was praised in all men's mouths and held in admiration, while they spake opprobriously and with bitter blame of our princes and the host which had long ago been raised, as is the wont of the common herd in their changing moods." *

Walsingham's final moral here is, after all, that of Chaucer: "O stormy people, unsad and ever untrue, Aye indiscreet, and changing as a vane!" † English writers seem, indeed, to speak of their countrymen as especially fickle and inconstant; and there was no doubt more reason for the charge in those days, when men in general were far more swayed by impulse and less by reflexion—when indeed the fundamental insecurity of the social and political fabric was such as to thwart even the ripest reflexion at every turn. It is striking how short-lived were the London trading

* John Philpot, it may be noted, was at this very time one of the Collectors of Customs under Chaucer's Comptrollership

† "C. T.," E., 995.

families until after Chaucer's time: no such succession as the Rothschilds and Barings was as yet possible. Moreover, in civic as in national politics, it was still possible to lose one's head for the crime of having shown too much zeal in a losing cause, as the career of Chaucer's colleague Brembre may testify.* Walsingham loses no opportunity of jeering at the inconstancy of the London citizens; he portrays their panic during the invasion scare of 1386, and during the King's suppression of their liberties in 1389–92, with all the superiority of a monk whose own skin was safe enough in the cloister of St. Alban's. On this latter occasion the citizens had to pay Richard the enormous fine of £20,000 —or, according to a Malmesbury monk, £40,000—for the restoration of their privileges; and even then they were glad to welcome him on his first gracious visit "as an angel of God."† But they bided their time, and Richard was to learn, like other sovereigns before and since, how heavy a sword the Londoners could throw into the political scale. Froissart noted that "they ever have been, are, and will be so long as the City stands, the most powerful of all England"; that what London thought was also what England thought; and that even a king might find he had gained but a Pyrrhic victory over them. "For where the men of London are at accord and fully agreed, no man dare gainsay them. They are of more weight than all the rest of England, nor dare any man drive them to bay, for they are most mighty in wealth and in men."‡

However little Chaucer may have interested himself in his neighbours, here were things which no poet could help seeing. The real history of Medieval London is

* The violent scenes of the years 1381–1391 are summarized in Wheatley's "London" (Medieval Towns), pp. 236–9. Among the victims of an unsuccessful cause were even Sir William Walworth and Sir John Philpot.

† Walsingham, an. 1392; "Eulog. Hist.," iii., 368.

‡ Ed. Luce, vol. i., pp. 224, 243, 249.

yet to be written; it will be a story of strange contrasts, gold and brass and iron and clay. But there was a greatness in the very disquiet and inconstancy of the city; some ideals were already fermenting there which, realized only after centuries of conflict, have made modern England what we are proud to see her; and other ideals of which we, like our forefathers, can only say that we trust in their future realization.

CHAPTER XI

"CANTERBURY TALES"—THE *DRAMATIS PERSONÆ*

"Pilgrims and palmers plighted them together
To seek St. James, and saints in Rome.
They went forth in their way with many wise tales,
And had leave to lie all their life after . . .
Hermits on an heap, with hooked staves,
Wenten to Walsingham, and their wenches after;
Great lubbers and long, that loth were to labour,
Clothed them in copes to be knowen from other,
And shaped themselves as hermits, their ease to have."
"Piers Plowman," B., Prol. 46

DURING those twelve years in Aldgate Tower, Chaucer's genius fought its way through the literary conventions of his time to the full assertion of its native originality. He had begun with allegory and moralization, after the model of the "Roman de la Rose"; shreds of these conventions clung to him even to the end of the Aldgate period; but they were already outworn. In "Troilus and Cressida" we have real men and women under all the classical machinery: they think and act as men thought and acted in Chaucer's time; and Pandarus especially is so lifelike and individual that Shakespeare will transfer him almost bodily to his own canvas. In the "House of Fame" and the "Legend of Good Women" the form indeed is again allegorical, but the poet's individuality breaks through this narrow mask; his self-revelations are franker and more direct than at any previous time; and in each case he wearied of the poem and broke off long before the end. With the humility of a true artist, he had practised his hand for years to draw carefully after the old acknowledged

models; but these now satisfied him less and less. His mind was stored with images which could not be forced into the narrow framework of a dream; he must find a canvas broad enough for all the life of his time; for the cream of all that he had seen and heard in Flanders and France and Italy, in the streets of London and on the open highways of a dozen English counties. Boccaccio, for a similar scheme, had brought together a company of young Florentines of the upper class, and of both sexes, in a villa-garden. Chaucer's plan of a pilgrim cavalcade gave him a variety of character as much greater as the company in a third-class carriage is more various than that in a West-end club.

In earlier ages, a pilgrimage had of course been a very solemn matter, involving the certainty of great labour and heavy privations, and with very considerable risk to life or limb. The crusades themselves were pilgrimages *en masse*, as contemporary chroniclers often remind us. At the commencement of an undertaking so serious, the pilgrims naturally sought the blessing of the Church; and there was a special service for their use. It is probable, however, that Chaucer's pilgrims troubled themselves as little about this service as about the special pilgrim's dress, the absence of which appears very plainly from his descriptions of their costume. For a century at least before he wrote, pilgrimages had been gradually becoming journeys rather of pleasure than of duty, for those who could afford the necessary expense which they entailed. Travelling indeed was not always safe; but when the pilgrim went alone and on foot he could always protect himself from most evil-doers by taking the traditional scrip and staff and gown which marked him as sacred; and often, as in Chaucer's case, a caravan was formed which might well defy all the ordinary perils of the road. The "mire" and "slough," which Chaucer more than once mentions, had always been as much a matter of common routine to everybody, even on his journey from farm to farm or

village to village, as a puncture is to the modern cyclist, or occasional external traction to the motorist. * Moreover, though the inns might not be what we should call luxurious, they offered abundant good cheer and good

A HOSTELRY AT NIGHT

(From a 15th-century MS. of "Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles" in the Hunterian Library at Glasgow)

fellowship to all who could pay the price. A certain Count of Poitou went about in disguise to find

* Cf. Mrs. Green, *loc. cit.*, ii., 31. "In 1499 a glover from Leighton Buzzard travelled with his wares to Aylesbury for the market before Christmas Day. It happened that an Aylesbury miller, Richard Boose, finding that his mill needed repairs, sent a couple of servants to dig clay 'called Ramming clay' for him on the highway, and was in no way dismayed because the digging of this clay made a great pit in the middle of the road ten feet wide, eight feet broad, and eight feet deep, which was quickly filled with water by the winter rains. But the unhappy glover, making his way from the town in the dusk, with his horse laden with panniers full of gloves, straightway fell into the pit, and man and horse were drowned. The miller was charged with his death, but was acquitted by the court on the ground that he had had no malicious intent, and had only dug the pit to repair his mill, and because he really did not know of any other place to get the kind of clay he wanted save the highroad."

what class of his subjects led the happiest life; he judged at last "that the merchants at fair-time, who go to taverns and find all the delicacies they can desire ready prepared, would lead the most delightful life of all, but for this one drawback, that they must at last settle the score for all that they have consumed."* If, at these inns, the pilgrims often found themselves packed into great dormitories fitted with berths like a ship's cabin, this was far less of a change from their ordinary habits than are those hardships to which modern mountain tourists cheerfully submit on occasion.† Any great change from the ordinary routine marks a bright spot in most men's minds, even in these days of many amusements and much locomotion; so that, in proportion as the King's peace grew more effectual in England, and places of pilgrimage multiplied, and the middle classes could better afford the expense of time or money, it became as natural to many people to go to Walsingham or Canterbury for the sake of the pleasant society as it was to choose a church for the sake of gossip or flirtation.‡ This is already complained of about 1250 A.D. by Berthold of Regensburg, one of the greatest mission-preachers of the 13th century. "Men talk nowadays in church as if it were at market. . . . One tells what he has seen on his pilgrimage to Palestine or Rome or Compostella: thou mayst easily say so much in church of these same pilgrimages, that God or St. James will give thee no

* Etienne de Bourbon, p. 411.

† T. Wright, "Homes of other Days," pp. 345 ff., whence I borrow the accompanying illustration from a MS. of the 15th century, representing the outside and inside of an inn. Incidentally, it illustrates also the common medieval phrase "naked in bed." Mrs. Green ("Town Life," ii., 33) quotes the grateful entry of a citizen in his public accounts "Paid for our bed there (and it was well worth it, witness, a featherbed) 1*d.*"

‡ There were *seventy* places of pilgrimage in Norfolk alone (Cutts, "Middle Ages," p. 162). For churches as trysting-places for lovers or gossips we have evidence on many sides, *e.g.* the lovers of the "Decameron" (Prologue and Epilogue), and the custom of "Paul's Walk" which lasted long after the Reformation.

reward therefore." Again, "Many a man journeys hence to St. James of Compostella, and never hears a single mass on the way out or back, and then they go with sport and laughter, and some seldom say even their Paternoster! This I say not to turn pilgrims aside from Compostella; I am not strong enough for that; but thou mightest earn more grace by a few masses than for all thy journey to Compostella and back. Now, what dost thou find at Compostella? St. James's head. Well and good: that is a dead skull: the better part is in heaven. Now, what findest thou at home, at thy yard-gate? When thou goest to church in the morning, thou findest the true God and Man, body and soul, as truly as on that day wherein He was born of our Lady St. Mary, the ever-Virgin, whose holiness is greater than all saints. . . . Thou mayst earn more reward at one mass than another man in his six weeks out to St. Jacob and six weeks back again: that makes twelve weeks." "Ye run to St. James, and sell so much at home that sometimes your wives and children must ever be the poorer for it, or thou thyself in need and debt all thy life long. Such a man crams himself so that he comes back far fatter than he went, and has much to say of what he has seen, and lets no man listen to the service or the sermon in church." Two other great preachers, Cardinal Jacques de Vitry shortly before Berthold, and Etienne de Bourbon shortly after him, speak of the debaucheries which were not unusual on pilgrimages: the latter tells how pilgrims sometimes sang obscene songs in chorus, and joined in dissolute dances with the lewd village folk over the very graves in the churchyard; he seems to speak of the German pilgrims as exceptional in singing religious songs. All this was a century before Chaucer's journey; and during those hundred years the institution had steadily lost in grace as it gained in popularity. The author of "Piers Plowman" not only notes how many rascals were to be found on pilgrimages, but would apparently have been glad to see them almost

entirely superseded. His professional pilgrim comes hung round with tokens from a hundred shrines; he has been at Rome, Compostella, Jerusalem, Sinai, Bethlehem, Babylon, and even in Armenia; but of "Saint Truth" he has never heard, and can give no help to those who are in real distress about their souls. An ideal society would be one in which St. James was sought only by the sick-beds of the poor, and pilgrims resorted no longer to Rome but to "prisons and poor cottages" instead. Seventeen years before Chaucer's journey, even a prelate of the Church dared to raise a similar protest. Archbishop Sudbury (then only Bishop of London) was met by a band of pilgrims on their way to Becket's Jubilee. They asked for his blessing; he told them plainly that the promised Plenary Indulgence would be useless to them unless they went in a more reverent spirit; and many simple souls were rather pained than surprised when Wat Tyler's mob, eleven years later, hacked off the head of so free-thinking an Archbishop on Tower Hill.* If this was what orthodox folk said already, then we need not wonder at Wycliffe's outspoken condemnation, or that a citizen of Nottingham, as early as 1395, was compelled under pain of the stake to promise (among other articles) "I shall never more despise pilgrimage."

Ten years after Chaucer, again, the Lollard Thorpe was tried before Archbishop Arundel, and painted pilgrimages exactly as Chaucer's Poor Parson would have described them. "Such fond people waste blamefully God's goods on their vain pilgrimages, spending their goods upon vicious hostelries, which are oft unclean women of their bodies. . . . Also, sir, I knowe well that when divers men and women will goe thus after their own willes, and finding out one pilgrimage, they will

* Berthold v. Regensburg, "Predigten," ed. Pfeiffer, i., 448, 459, 493; Et. de Bourbon, p. 167; "Piers Plowman," B., v., 527, C., v., 123; Wharton, "Anglia Sacra," i., 49, 50.

ordaine with them before, to have with them both men and women that can well sing wanton songes, and some other pilgrimes will have with them bagge pipes; so that everie towne that they come through, what with the noise of their singing, and with the sound of their piping, and with the jangling of their Canterburie bels, and with the barking out of dogges after them, that they make more noise, then if the king came there away, with all his clarions, and many other minstrels. And if these men and women be a moneth out in their pilgrimage, many of them shall be an halfe yeare after, great janglers, tale-tellers, and liers." * A century later, we find Archbishop Warham and the Pope negotiating privately about Becket's Jubilee in a frankly commercial spirit, while Erasmus publicly held up the Canterbury Pilgrimage to ridicule; and a few years later again St. Thomas was declared a traitor, his shrine was plundered, and the pilgrimages ceased. It may indeed be said that the Canterbury Pilgrimage would not have been so proper for our poet's dramatic purpose but that most of its religious earnestness had long since evaporated.

But what a canvas it was in 1387, and how frankly Chaucer utilized all its possibilities! The opportunity of bringing in any tale which lay nearest to his heart—for what tale in the world was there that might not come naturally from one or other of this party?—was only a part of all that this subject offered, as the poet realized from the very first. Even more delightful than any of the tales told by Chaucer's pilgrims, is the tale which he tells us about them all: the story of their journey to Canterbury. Nowhere within so brief a compass can we realize either the life of the 14th century on one hand, or on the other that dramatic power in which Chaucer stands second only to Shakespeare

* "Wyclif's Works," ed. Arnold, i., 83; cf. other quotations in Lechler; "Wiclif," Section x., notes 286, 288; Jusserand, "Vie Nomade," p. 296; Foxe (Parker Soc.), vol. iii., p. 268.

among English poets. Forget for a while the separate tales of the pilgrims—many of which were patched up by fits and starts during such broken leisure as this man of the world could afford for indulging his poetical fancies; while many others (like the Monk's and the Parson's) are tedious to modern readers in strict proportion to their dramatic propriety at the moment—forget for once all but the Prologue and the end-links, and read these through at one sitting, from the first stirrup-cup at Southwark Tabard to that final crest of Harbledown where the weary travellers look down at last upon the sacred city of their pilgrimage. There is no such story as this in all medieval literature; no such wonderful gallery of finished portraits, nor any drama so true both to common life and to perfect art. The *dramatis personæ* of the "Decameron" are mere puppets in comparison; their occasional talk seems to us insipid to the last degree of old-world fashion; Boccaccio's preface and interludes are as much less dramatic than Chaucer's as their natural background is more picturesque, with its Great Plague in Florence and its glimpses of the Val d'Arno from that sweet hill-garden of cypress and stone-pine and olive. Boccaccio wrote for a society that was in many ways over-refined already; it is fortunate for us that Chaucer's public was not yet at that point of literary development at which art is too often tempted into artifice. He took the living men day by day, each in his simplest and most striking characteristics; and from all these motley figures, under the artist's hand, grew a mosaic in which each stands out with all the glow of his own native colour, and with all the added glory of the jewelled hues around him. The sharp contrasts of medieval society gave the poet here a splendid opportunity. In days when the distinctions of rank were so marked and so unforgettable, even to the smallest details of costume, the Knight's dignity risked nothing by unbending to familiar jest with the Host; and the variety of characters

which Chaucer has brought together in this single cavalcade is as probable in nature as it is artistically effective. All moods, from the most exalted piety down to the coarsest buffoonery, were possible and natural on a journey religious indeed in essential conception, but which had by this time become so common and worldly a function that few pilgrims dreamed of putting off the old Adam until the white walls of Canterbury came in sight. The plot has in it all the charm of spring, of open-air travel, and of passing good-fellowship without afterthought; the rich fields of Kent, the trees budding into their first green, mine ease in mine inn at night, and over all the journey a far-off halo of sanctity.

On the evening of Tuesday, April 16, 1387, twenty-nine pilgrims found themselves together in the Tabard at Southwark.* This hostelry lay almost within a stone's throw of Chaucer's birthplace, and within sight of many most notable London landmarks. Behind lay the priory of St. Mary Overy, where Gower was now lodging among the friendly and not too ascetic monks, and where he still lies carved in stone, with his three great books for a pillow to his head. A few yards further in the background stood London Bridge, the eighth marvel of the world, with its twenty arches, its two chapels, its double row of houses, and its great tower bristling with rebel skulls. Wat Tyler's head was among the newest there on that spring evening; and in five years the head of Chaucer's Earl of Worcester was to attain the same bad eminence. Beyond the bridge rose the walls and guard-towers of the city, the open quays and nodding wooden houses, and a hundred and fifty church steeples, seldom indeed of any great architectural pretensions individually, but most picturesque in their variety, and dominated by

* Chaucer himself tells us the day in the "Man of Lawe's Prologue"; Prof. Skeat has accumulated highly probable evidence for the year 1387 (vol. iii., p. 373, and vol. v., p. 75).

the loftiest of all existing European structures—the wooden spire of old St. Paul's.*

Nor were the pilgrims themselves less picturesque than the background of their journey. At the head of the first group the Knight, so fresh from the holy wars that the grease of his armour still stains his leather

Short was his gown, with sleevës long and wide.
Well could he sit on horse, and fairë ride

THE SQUIRE OF THE "CANTERBURY TALES"
(From the Ellesmere MS. (15th century))

doublet, and that we guess his rank only from the excellence of his steed and his own high breeding—

And though that he were worthy, he was wise,
And of his port as meek as is a maid.
He never yet no villainy ne said
In all his life, unto no manner wight.
He was a very perfect gentle knight.

* About 520 feet from the ground, according to Hollar, but more probably a little short of 500 feet. (H. B. Wheatley, "London," p. 333.) It must be remembered also how high the cathedral site rises above the river.

Then his son, the Squire, a model of youthful beauty and strength, who had already struck many a good blow in France for his lady's grace, but who shows here his gentler side, with yellow curls falling upon the shortest of fashionable jackets and the longest of sleeves—

> Embroidered was he, as it were a mead
> All full of freshë flowrës, white and red.
> Singing he was, or fluting, all the day;
> He was as fresh as is the month of May.

And lastly their single attendant, the nut-headed yeoman forestér, with his suit of Lincoln green, his peacock arrows, and his mighty bow.

After chivalry comes the Church; and first the fine black cloth and snowy linen of Madam Eglantine and her fellow nun, clean and dainty and demure, like a pair of aristocratic pussy-cats on a drawing-room hearthrug. Their male escort, the Nuns' Priest, commands no great reverence from mine Host, who, however, will presently doff his cap before the Prioress, and address her with a studied deference even beyond the courtesy which he renders to the Knight. Her dignified reserve, her natural anxiety to set off a fine person with more elaboration of costume than the strict Rule permitted, her French of Stratford attë Bowe, her tenderness to lapdogs and even to marauding mice, her faultless refinement of behaviour under the ticklish conditions of a 14th-century dinner-table—all these pardonable luxuries of a fastidious nature are described with Chaucer's most delicate irony, and stand in artistic contrast to the grosser indiscipline of the Monk. This "manly man, to be an abbot able," contemptuously repudiated the traditional restraints of the cloister, and even the comparatively mild discipline of those smaller and therefore less rigorous "cells" which the fiery zeal of St. Bernard stigmatized as "Synagogues of Satan."* He scoffed at the Benedictine prohibition of

* Bern. Ep. 25; cf. "Liber Guillelmi Majoris," p. 478.

field sports and of extravagant dress, and at the old-fashioned theory of subduing the flesh by hard brain-work or field labour; yet at bottom he seems to have been a good fellow enough, with a certain real dignity of character; and the discipline which he so unceremoniously rejected had by this time (as we may see from the official records of his Order) grown very generally obsolete. But still more strange to the earlier ideals of his Order was the next cleric on Chaucer's list, the Friar. Father Hubert is one of those jovial sinners for whom old Adam has always a lurking sympathy even when the new Adam feels most bound to condemn them. Essentially irreligious even in his most effective religious discourse; greedy, unabashed, as ubiquitous and intrusive as a bluebottle fly, he is yet always supple and ingratiating; a favourite boon-companion of the country squires, but still more popular with many women; equally free and easy with barmaids at a tavern or with wife and daughter in a citizen's hall. The Summoner and the Pardoner, parasites that crawled on the skirts of the Church and plied under her broad mantle their dubious trade in sacred things, had not even the Friar's redeeming features; yet we see at a glance their common humanity, and even recognize in our modern world many of the follies on which they were tempted to trade. Two figures alone among this company go far to redeem the Church—the Scholar and the Poor Parson. The former's disinterested devotion to scholarship has passed into a proverb: "gladly would he learn, and gladly teach" —an ideal which then, as always, went too often hand in hand with leanness and poverty. The Parson, contentedly poor himself and full of compassion for his still poorer neighbours, equally ready at time of need to help the struggling sinner or to "snib" the impenitent rich man, has often tempted earlier commentators to read their own religious prepossessions into Chaucer's verse. One party has assumed that so

good a priest must have been a Lollard, or Wycliffe himself; while others have contended (with even less show of evidence, as we shall presently see) that he represents the typical orthodox rector or vicar of Chaucer's time. The one thing of which we may be certain is that Chaucer knew and reverenced goodness when he saw it, and that he would willingly have subscribed to Thackeray's humble words, "For myself, I am a heathen and a publican, but I can't help thinking that those men are in the right." In the Tales themselves, as on the pilgrimage, a multitude of sins are covered by this ploughman's brother, of whom it is written that—

> Christës lore, and His apostles' twelve,
> He taught, and first he followed it him-selve.

To summarize even briefly the appearance and character of the remaining eighteen pilgrims would be too long a task; but it must be noticed how infallible an eye Chaucer had for just the touch which makes a portrait live. The Country Squire, looking like a daisy with his fiery face and white beard; the Sailor, embarrassed with his horse; the Wife of Bath, "somedeal deaf," and therefore as loud in her voice as in her dress; the Summoner's scurvy eczema under his thick black eyebrows; the Pardoner's smooth yellow hair and eyes starting out of his head; the thick-set Miller, with a red-bristled wart on the end of his nose, and a bullet head with which he could burst in a door at one charge; and his rival the slender, choleric Reeve—

> Full longë were his leggës and full lean,
> Y-like a staff; there was no calf y-seen!

A goodly company, indeed, and much to the taste of Harry Bailey, mine host of the Tabard, whom we may pretty safely identify with an actual contemporary and fellow M.P. of Chaucer's.* He proposes, therefore, to

* Skeat, v., p. 129. "In the subsidy Rolls (1380–1) for Southwark, occurs the entry 'Henri Bayliff, Ostyler . . . 2*s*.' In the Parliament held

be their guide and master of the ceremonies on the road to Canterbury and back. The pilgrims themselves shall tell tales to shorten the journey, "drawing cut"

A white coat and a blue hood wearëd he,
A bagpipe well couldë he blow and sound,
And therewithal he brought us out of town.

THE MILLER
(From the Ellesmere MS.)

for their order; and the teller of the best tale shall, on their return, enjoy a supper at the expense of the rest—

> By one assent
> We be accorded to his judgëment;
> And thereupon the wine was set anon;
> We drunken, and to restë went each one
> Withouten any longer tarrying.
>
> A-morrow, when the day began to spring,
> Up rose the host, and was our aller cock, [for all of us
> And gathered us together in a flock. . . .

at Westminster (1376–7) Henry Bailly was one of the representatives for that borough, and again, in the Parliament at Gloucester, 2, Rich. II., the name occurs."

CHAPTER XII

"CANTERBURY TALES"—FIRST AND SECOND DAYS

"For lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."—SOLOMON'S SONG

HERE, then, they are assembled on a perfect morning of English spring, with London streets awakening to life behind them, and the open road in front. Think of the dayspring from on high, the good brown earth and tender foliage, smoke curling up from cottage chimneys, pawing steeds, barking dogs, the cheerful stirrup-cup; every rider's face set to the journey after his individual mood, when at last the Host had successfully gathered his flock—

> And forth we ride, a little more than pace,
> Unto the watering of Saint Thomas.

That is, to the little brook which now runs underground near the second milestone on the Old Kent Road, remembered only in the name of St. Thomas' Road and the Thomas à Becket Tavern. Up to this point the party had been enlivened by the Miller's bagpipe, and Professor Raleigh has justly pointed out how many musicians there are in Chaucer's company: the Squire; the Prioress with her psalms, "entuned in her nose full seemëly"; the Friar, who could sing so well to his own harp; the Pardoner, with his "Come hither, love, to me," and the Summoner, who accompanied him in so "stiff" a bass. By St. Thomas' watering, however, either the Miller is out of breath or the party are out of patience, for here the Host reins up, and reminds them

of their promise to tell tales on the way. They draw cuts, and the longest straw (whether by chance or by Boniface's sleight of hand) falls to the one man with whom none other would have disputed for precedence. The Knight, with ready courtesy, welcomed the choice "in God's name," and rode on, bidding the company "hearken what I say." Let us not inquire too closely how far every word was audible to the whole thirty, as they clattered and splashed along. We may always be sure that enough was heard to keep the general interest alive, and it may be charitably hoped that the two nuns were among those who caught least.

The Knight's tale was worthy of his reputation—chivalrous, dignified, with some delicate irony and many flights of lofty poetry. The Host laughed aloud for joy of this excellent beginning, and called upon the Monk for the next turn; but here suddenly broke in—

> The Miller, that for-dronken was all pale
> So that unnethe upon his horse he sat . . . [scarcely
> And swore by armës and by blood and bones
> 'I can a noble talë for the nonce
> With which I will now quit the Knightës tale.'
> Our Hostë saw that he was drunk of ale
> And said, 'abide, Robin, my lievë brother,
> Some better man shall tell us first another;
> Abide, and let us worken thriftily.'
> 'By Goddës soul,' quoth he, 'that will not I;
> For I will speak, or ellës go my way.'
> Our Host answered: 'Tell on, a devil way!
> Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome.'
> 'Now hearken,' quoth the Miller, 'all and some!
> But first I make a protestatioun
> That I am drunk, I know it by my soun; [sound
> And therefore, if that I misspeak or say,
> Wite it the ale of Southwark, I you pray; [blame
> For I will tell a legend and a life
> Both of a carpenter and of his wife. . . .'

The Reeve (who is himself a carpenter also) protests in vain against such slander of honest folk and their wives. Robin Miller has the bit between his teeth, and

plunges now headlong into his tale as he had run in old times against the door—a "churlës tale," but told with consummate dramatic effect, and recorded by Chaucer with a half-ironical apology—

> And therefore every gentle wight I pray
> For Goddës love, deem ye not that I say
> Of evil intent, but that I must rehearse
> Their talës allë, be they better or worse,
> Or ellës falsen some of my matère.
> And therefore, whoso list it not to hear,
> Turn over the leaf and choose another tale.

The Miller's story proved an apple of discord in its small way, but poetically effective in the variety which it and its fellows lent to the journey—

> Diversë folk diversëly they said,
> But for the mostë part they laughed and played;
> Nor at this tale I saw no man him grieve,
> But it were only Osëwold the Reeve,"

who, though chiefly sensible to the slur upon his own profession, lays special stress on the indecorum of the Miller's proceeding. Some men (he says) are like medlars, never ripe till they be rotten, and with all the follies of youth under their grizzling hairs—

> When that our host had heard this sermoning,
> He gan to speak as lordly as a King:
> He saidë 'What amounteth all this wit?
> What shall we speak all day of holy writ? [why
> The devil made a Reevë for to preach,
> And of a cobbler a shipman or a leech!
> Say forth thy tale, and tarry not the time,
> Lo, Depëford, and it is halfway prime.
> Lo Greenëwich, there many a shrew is in;
> It were all time thy talë to begin.'

The story records, by way of natural revenge, the domestic misfortunes of a Miller; and, for all the Reeve's moral indignation, it is as essentially "churlish" as its predecessor, and as popular with at least one section of the party—

The Cook of London, while the Reeve spake,
For joy, him thought, he clawed him on the back,
'Ha, ha!' quoth he, 'for Christës passioun,
This Miller had a sharp conclusion . . .
But God forbiddë that we stinten here;
And therefore, if that ye vouchsafe to hear
A tale of me, that am a poorë man,
I will you tell as well as ever I can
A little jape that fell in our citie." [jest

The Host gives leave on the one condition that the tale shall be fresher and wholesomer than the Cook's victuals sometimes are—

'For many a pasty hast thou letten blood,
And many a Jack of Dover hast thou sold [meat pie
That hath been twyës hot and twyës cold!
Of many a pilgrim hast thou Christës curse,
For of thy parsley yet they fare the worse
That they have eaten with thy stubble-goose;
For in thy shop is many a flyë loose!'

The Cook's "little jape," however, to judge by its commencement, was even more fly-blown than his stubble-goose. The Miller seemed to have let loose every riotous element, and to have started the company upon a downward slope of accelerating impropriety. But this to Chaucer would have been more than a sin, it would have been an obvious artistic blunder; and when the ribaldry begins in earnest, the best manuscripts break off with "of this Cook's tale maked Chaucer no more." In other MSS. the Cook himself breaks off in disgust at his own story, and tells the heroic tale of Gamelyn, which Chaucer may possibly have meant to rewrite for the series. Here end the tales of the first day; incomplete enough, as indeed the whole book is only a fragment of Chaucer's mighty plan. The pilgrims probably slept at Dartford, fifteen miles from London.

Next morning the Host seems to have found it hard to keep his team together; it is ten o'clock when he begins to bewail the time already wasted, and prays the Man of Law to tell a tale. The lawyer assents in a

speech interlarded with legal French and legal metaphors, and referring at some length to Chaucer's other poems. He then launches into a formal prologue, and finally tells the pious Custance's strange adventures by land and sea. This, if not so generally popular with the company as other less decorous tales before and after it, enjoyed at least a genuine *succès d'estime.* Thereupon followed one of the liveliest of all Chaucer's dialogues. The Host called upon the Parish Priest for a tale, adjuring him "for Goddës bones" and "by Goddës dignitie." "*Benedicite!*" replied the Parson; "what aileth the man, so sinfully to swear?" upon which the Host promptly scents "a Lollard in the wind," and ironically bids his companions prepare for a sermon.* The Shipman, professionally indifferent to oaths of whatever description, and bold in conscious innocence of all puritanical taint, here interposes an emphatic veto—

> 'Nay, by my father's soul, that shall he not,'
> Saidë the Shipman; 'here he shall not preach.
> He shall no gospel glosen here nor teach. [expound
> We believe all in the great God,' quoth he,
> 'He wouldë sowen some difficultee,
> Or springen cockle in our cleanë corn;
> And therefore, Host, I warnë thee beforn,
> My jolly body shal a talë tell,
> And I shall clinken you so merry a bell
> That I shall waken all this companye;
> But it shall not be of philosophye,
> Nor *physices*, nor termës quaint of law,
> There is but little Latin in my maw.'

The bluff skipper is as good as his word; his tale is frankly unprofessional, and its infectious jollity must almost have appealed to the Parson himself, even though it reeked with the most orthodox profanity, and showed no point of contact with puritanism except a low estimate of average monastic morals.

* The too strict avoidance of oaths had long been authoritatively noted as suggesting a presumption of heresy; here (as in so many other places) Chaucer admirably illustrates formal and official documents.

'Well said, by *Corpus Dominus*,' quoth our Host,
'Now longë mayest thou sailë by the coast,
Sir gentle master, gentle mariner! . . .
Draw ye no monkës more unto your inn!
But now pass on, and let us seek about
Who shall now tellë first, of all this rout,
Another tale;' and with that word he said,
As courteously as it had been a maid,
'My lady Prioressë, by your leave,
So that I wist I shouldë you not grieve,
I wouldë deemen that ye tellen should
A talë next, if so were that ye would.
Now will ye vouchësafe, my lady dear?'
'Gladly,' quoth she, and said as ye shall hear.

The gentle lady tells that charming tale which Burne-Jones so loved and adorned, of the little scholar murdered by Jews for his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and sustained miraculously by her power. Chaucer loved the Prioress; and he makes us feel the reverent hush which followed upon her tale—

When said was all this miracle, every man
So sober was, that wonder was to see,
Till that our Hostë japen then began,
And then at erst he lookëd upon me,
And saidë thus: 'What man art thou?' quoth he;
'Thou lookest as thou wouldest find an hare,
For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.

Approachë near, and look up merrily.
Now ware you, sirs, and let this man have place!
He in the waist is shape as well as I;
This were a puppet in an arm to embrace
For any woman, small and fair of face!
He seemeth elvish by his countenance,
For unto no wight doth he dalliance.

Say now somewhat, since other folk have said;
Tell us a tale of mirth, and that anon. . . .'

Chaucer executes himself as willingly as the rest, and enters upon a long-winded tale of knight-errantry, parodied from the romances in vogue; but the Age of Chivalry is already half past. Before the poet has

even finished the preliminary catalogue of his hero's accomplishments—

'No more of this, for Goddës dignitee,'
Quoth our Hostë, 'for thou makest me
So weary of thy very lewedness [folly
That (all so wisely God my soulë bless)
Mine earës achen of thy drasty speech [trashy
Now, such a rhyme the devil I biteche! [commit to
This may well be rhyme doggerel,' quoth he.

Chaucer suffers the interruption with only the mildest of protests, and proceeds to tell instead "a lytel thing in prose," a translation of a French translation of a long-winded moral allegory by an Italian friar-preacher. The monumental dulness of this "Tale of Melibee and of his wife Prudence" is no doubt a further stroke of satire, and Chaucer must have felt himself amply avenged in recounting this story to the bitter end. Yet there was a moral in it which appealed to the Host, who burst out—

. . . as I am a faithful man
And by that precious *corpus Madrian* [St. Mathurin
I haddë liever than a barrel ale
That goodë lief my wife had heard this tale.
For she is nothing of such patience
As was this Melibeus' wife Prudence.
By Goddës bonës, when I beat my knaves,
She bringeth me forth the greatë clubbëd staves,
And crieth 'Slay the doggës every one.
And break them, bothë back and every bone!'
And if that any neighëbour of mine,
Will not in churchë to my wife incline,
Or be so hardy to her to trespass,
When she com'th home she rampeth in my face
And crieth 'Falsë coward, wreak thy wife!
By corpus bones! I will have thy knife,
And thou shalt have my distaff and go spin!'

The Host has plenty more to say on this theme; but presently he remembers his duties, and calls upon the Monk for a tale, though not without another long digression on monastic comforts and monastic morals,

from the point of view of the man in the street. The Monk takes all his broad jesting with the good humour of a man who is used to it, and offers to tell some tragedies, "of which I have an hundred in my cell." After a few harmless pedantries by way of prologue, he proceeds to reel off instalments of his hundred tragedies with the steady, self-satisfied, merciless drone of a man whose office and cloth generally assure him of a patient hearing. Here, however, we are no longer in the minster, but in God's own sunlight and fresh air; the Pilgrim's Way is Liberty Hall; and while Dan Piers is yet moralizing with damnable iteration over the ninth of his fallen heroes, the Knight suddenly interrupts him—the Knight himself, who never yet no villainy ne said, in all his life, unto no manner wight!

'Ho!' quoth the Knight, 'good sir, no more of this!
What ye have said is right enough, ywis [certainly
And muckle more; for little heaviness
Is right enough to many folk, I guess.
I say for me it is a great dis-ease,
Where as men have been in great wealth and ease
To hearen of their sudden fall, alas!
And the contrary is joy and great solace . . .
And of such thing were goodly for to tell.'
'Yea,' quoth our Host, 'by Saintë Paulës Bell! . . .
Sir Monk, no more of this, so God you bless,
Your tale annoyeth all this companye;
Such talking is not worth a butterflye,
For therein is there no desport nor game.
Wherefore, sire Monk, or Dan Piers by your name,
I pray you heartily, tell us somewhat else;
For surely, but for clinking of your bells
That on your bridle hang on every side,
By Heaven's King, that for us allë died,
I should ere this have fallen down for sleep,
Although the slough had never been so deep . . .
Sir, say somewhat of hunting, I you pray.'
'Nay,' quoth this Monk, 'I have no lust to play;
Now let another tell, as I have told.'
Then spake our Host with rudë speech and bold,
And said unto the Nunnës Priest anon,
'Come near, thou Priest, come hither, thou Sir John!
Tell us such thing as may our heartës glad;

Be blithë, though thou ride upon a jade.
What though thine horse be bothë foul and lean?
If it will serve thee, reck thou not a bean;
Look that thine heart be merry evermo!'

The domestic confessor of stately Madame Eglantine is possibly accustomed to sudden and peremptory commands; in any case, he obeys readily enough here. "'Yes, sir,' quoth he, 'yes, Host'" . . . and proceeds to recount that tragi-comedy of Reynard and Chanticleer which, well-worn as the plot is, shows off to perfection many of Chaucer's rarest artistic qualities.

The tale is told, and the Host shows his appreciation by saluting the Nuns' Priest with the same broad gibes and innuendoes with which he had already greeted the Monk. Here probably ends the second day; the Pilgrims would sleep at Rochester, which was in sight when the Monk began his Tale.

CHAPTER XIII

"CANTERBURY TALES"—THIRD AND FOURTH DAYS

". . . quasi peregrin, che si ricrea
Nel tempio del suo voto riguardando,
E spera gia ridir com' ello stea."

"Paradiso," xxxi., 43

ON the morning of the third day we find the Physician speaking; he tells the tragedy of Virginia, not straight from Livy, whom Chaucer had probably never had a chance of reading, but from its feebler echo in the "Roman de la Rose." Even so, however, the pity of it comes home to his hearers.

Our Hostë gan to swear as he were wood; [mad
'Harrow!' quoth he, 'by nailës and by blood!
This was a false churl and a false justice! . . .
By *Corpus* bonës! but I have triacle [medicinal syrup
Or else a draught of moist and corny ale,
Or but I hear anon a merry tale,
Mine heart is lost, for pity of this maid.
Thou *bel ami*, thou Pardoner,' he said
'Tell us some mirth, or japës, right anon!'
'It shall be done,' quoth he, 'by saint Ronyon!
But first' (quoth he) 'here at this alë stake
I will both drink and eaten of a cake.'
And right anon the gentles gan to cry
'Nay! let him tell us of no ribaldry. . . .'
'I grant, ywis, quoth he; 'but I must think
Upon some honest thing, the while I drink.'

The suspicion of the "gentles" might seem premature; but they evidently suspected this pardon-monger of too copious morning-draughts already, and the tenor of his whole prologue must have confirmed their fears. With the cake in his mouth, and the froth of the pot

on his lips, he takes as his text, *Radix malorum est cupiditas*, "Covetousness is the root of all evil," and exposes with cynical frankness the tricks of his trade. By a judicious use of "my longë crystal stones, y-crammëd full of cloutës and of bones," I make (says he) my round 100 marks a year;* and, when the people have offered, then I mount the pulpit, nod east and west upon the congregation like a dove on a barn-gable, and preach such tales as this. . . . Hereupon follows his tale of the three thieves who all murdered each other for the same treasure. It is told with admirable spirit; and now the Pardoner, carried away by sheer force of habit, calls upon the company to kiss his relics, make their offerings, and earn his indulgences piping-hot from Rome. Might not a horse stumble here, at this very moment, and break the neck of some unlucky pilgrim, who would then bitterly regret his lost opportunities in hell or purgatory? Strike, then, while the iron is hot—

> I counsel that our Host here shall begin,
> For he is most envelopëd in sin!
> . . . Come forth, sir Host, and offer first anon,
> And thou shalt kiss my relics every one . . .
> Yea, for a groat! unbuckle anon thy purse.
> 'Nay, nay,' quoth he, 'then have I Christë's curse . . .

The Host, as his opening words may suggest, answers to the purpose, easy words to understand, but not so easy to print here in the broad nakedness of their scorn for the Pardoner and all his works—

> This Pardoner answerëd not a word;
> So wroth he was, no wordë would he say.
> 'Now,' quoth our Host, 'I will no longer play
> With thee, nor with none other angry man.'
> But right anon the worthy Knight began
> (When that he saw that all the people lough) [laughed
> 'No more of this, for it is right enough! [quite
> Sir Pardoner, be glad and merry of cheer;
> And ye, sir Host, that be to me so dear,

* About £1000 in modern money.

I pray now that ye kiss the Pardoner ;
And, Pardoner, I pray thee draw thee near,
And, as we diden, let us laugh and play.'
Anon they kist, and riden forth their way.

The thread of the tales here breaks off; and then suddenly we find the Wife of Bath talking, talking, talking, almost without end as she was without beginning. Her prologue is half a dozen tales in itself, longer

Upon an ambler easily she sat,
Y-wimpled well, and on her head an hat
As broad as is a buckler or a targe ;
A foot-mantle about her hippës large,
And on her feet a pair of spurrës sharp.

THE WIFE OF BATH
(From the Ellesmere MS.)

almost, and certainly wittier, than all the other prologues put together. The theme is marriage, and her mouth speaks from the abundance of her heart. Here, indeed, we have God's plenty: fish, flesh, and fowl are set before us in one dish, not to speak of creeping things: it is in truth a strong mess, savoury to those that have the stomach for it, but reeking of garlic,

crammed with oaths like the Shipman's talk; a sample of the Eternal Feminine undisguised and unrefined, in its most glaring contrast with the only other two women of the party, the Prioress and her fellow-nun—

> Men may divine, and glosen up and down,
> But well I wot, express, withouten lie,
> God bade us for to wax and multiply;
> That gentle text can I well understand.
> Eke, well I wot, he said that mine husband
> Should leavë father and mother, and takë me;
> But of no number mention madë he
> Of bigamy or of octogamy,
> Why shouldë men speak of it villainy?

The good wife tells how she has outlived five husbands, and proclaims her readiness for a sixth. The five martyrs are sketched with a master-touch, and are divided into categories according to their obedience or disobedience. But, with all their variety of disposition, time and matrimony had tamed even the most stubborn of them; even that clerk of Oxford whose earlier wont had been to read aloud nightly by the fire from a Book of Bad Women—

> . . . And when I saw he wouldë never fine [finish
> To readen on this cursed book all night,
> All suddenly three leavës have I plight [plucked
> Out of his book, right as he read; and eke
> I with my fist so took him on the cheek
> That in our fire he fell backward adown;
> And up he start as doth a wood lioun [mad
> And with his fist he smote me on the head,
> That in the floor I lay as I were dead . . .

But the quarrels of lovers are the renewal of love; and when the husband had been brought, half by violence and half by cajolery, to give his wife her own way in everything, then—

> After that day we never had debate.
> God help me so, I was to him as kind
> As any wife from Denmark unto Ind.

For all social purposes, as we have said, this was

the only woman of the company; and where there is one woman there are always two men as ready to quarrel over her as if she were Helen of Troy. Moreover, in this case, professional jealousies were also at work. Already in the middle of her prologue the Summoner had fallen into familiar dialogue with this merry wife; and now, at the end—

The Friar laughed when he had heard all this;
'Now, dame,' quoth he, 'so have I joy or bliss,
This is a long preamble of a tale!'
And when the Summoner heard the Friar gale [cry out
'Lo,' quoth the Summoner, Goddës armes two!
A friar will intermit him ever-mo. [interfere
Lo, goodë men, a fly, and eke a frere
Will fall in every dishë and matère.
What speak'st thou of a "preambulation"?
What? amble, or trot, or peace, or go sit down!
Thou lettest our disport in this manère.'
'Yea, wilt thou so, sir Summoner?' quoth the Frere;
'Now, by my faith, I shall, ere that I go,
Tell of a Summoner such a tale or two
That all the folk shall laughen in this place.'
'Now ellës, Friar, I beshrew thy face,' [curse
Quoth this Summoner, 'and I beshrewë me,
But if I tellë talës, two or three,
Of friars, ere I come to Sittingbourne,
That I shall make thine heartë for to mourn,
For well I wot thy patience is gone.'
Our Hostë crièd 'Peace! and that anon;'
And saidë: 'Let the woman tell her tale;
Ye fare as folk that drunken be of ale.
Do, dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best.'
'All ready, sir,' quoth she, 'right as you list,
If I have licence of this worthy Frere.'
'Yes, dame,' quoth he, 'tell forth, and I will hear.'

The lady, having thus definitely notified her choice between the rivals (on quite other grounds, as the next few lines show, than those of religion or morality), proceeds to tell her tale on the theme that nothing is so dear to the female heart as "sovereignty" or "mastery." Then the quarrel blazes up afresh, and the Friar (after an insulting prologue for which the

Host calls him to order) tells a story which is, from first to last, a bitter satire on the whole tribe of Summoners. Then the Summoner, "quaking like an aspen leaf for ire," stands up in his stirrups and claims to be heard in turn. His prologue, which by itself might suffice to turn the tables on his enemy, is a broad parody of those revelations to devout Religious which announced how the blessed souls of their particular Order (for the Friars were not alone in this egotism) enjoyed for their exclusive use some choice and peculiar mansion in heaven—under the skirts of the Virgin's mantle, for instance, or even within the

His eyen twinkled in his head aright
As do the starrës in a frosty night.

THE FRIAR
(From the Ellesmere MS.)

wound of their Saviour's side. Then begins the tale itself of a Franciscan Stiggins on his daily rounds, and of the "oldë churl, with lockës hoar," who at one stroke blasphemed the whole convent, and took ample change out of Friar John for many a good penny or fat meal given in the past, and for much friction in his conjugal relations. The whole is told with inimitable humour, and it is to be regretted that we hear nothing of the comments with which it was received. At this point comes another gap in Chaucer's plan.

Then suddenly our Host calls upon the Clerk of Oxford—

> Ye ride as still and coy as doth a maid,
> Were newly spousëd, sitting at the board ;
> This day ne heard I of your tongue a word . . .
> For Goddës sake, as be of better cheer !
> It is no timë for to study here.

The Clerk, thus rudely shaken from his meditations, tells the story of Patient Griselda, which he had "learned at Padua, of a worthy clerk . . . Francis Petrarch, the laureate poet." The good Clerk softens down much of that which most shocks the modern mind in this truly medieval conception of wifely obedience ; and, as a confirmed bachelor, he adds an ironical postscript which is as clever as anything Chaucer ever wrote.* We must revere the heroine, but despair of finding her peer—

> Griseld' is dead, and eke her patience,
> And both at once buriëd in Itayle.

So begins this satirical ballad, and goes on to bid the wife of the present day to enjoy herself at her husband's expense—

> Be aye of cheer as light as leaf on lind, [lime-tree
> And let him care and weep, and wring and wail !

The last line rouses a sad echo in one heart at least, for the Merchant had been wedded but two months—

> 'Weeping and wailing, care and other sorrow,
> I know enough, on even and a-morrow'
> Quoth the Merchant, 'and so do other more
> That wedded be . . .'

His tale turns accordingly on the misadventures of an old knight who had been foolish enough to marry a girl in her teens. Upon this the Host congratulates

* "Its unsuitableness to the Clerk has often been noticed," writes Mr. Pollard ; but surely those who find fault here have forgotten the obvious truth voiced by the Wife of Bath, "For trust ye well, it is impossible that any clerk will speakë good of wives."

himself that *his* wife, with all her shrewishness and other vices more, is "as true as any steel." Here ends the third day; the travellers probably slept at the Pilgrim's House at Ospringe, parts of which stand still as Chaucer saw it.

Next morning the Squire is first called upon to

> . . . say somewhat of love; for certes ye
> Do ken thereon as much as any man.

He modestly disclaims the compliment, and tells (or rather leaves half told) the story of Cambuscan, with the magic ring and mirror and horse of brass. Chaucer had evidently intended to finish the story; for the Franklin is loud in praise of the young man's eloquence, and sighs to mark the contrast with his own son, who, in spite of constant paternal "snybbings," haunts dice and low company, and shows no ambition to learn of "gentillesse." "Straw for your 'gentillessë,' quoth our Host," and forthwith demands a tale from the Franklin, who, with many apologies for his want of rhetoric, tells admirably a Breton legend of chivalry and magic.

Another gap brings us to the Second Nun, who tells the tale of St. Cecilia from the Golden Legend, with a prefatory invocation to the Virgin translated from Dante. By the time this is ended the pilgrims are five miles further on, at Boughton-under-Blee. Here, at the foot of the hilly forest of Blean, with only eight more miles before them to Canterbury, they are startled by the clattering of horse-hoofs behind them. It was a Canon Regular with a Yeoman at his heels.* The man had seen the pilgrims at daybreak, and warned his master; and the two had ridden hard to overtake so merry a company. While the Canon greeted the pilgrims, our Host questioned his Yeoman, who first obscurely hinted, and then began openly to relate, such

* This highly dramatic addition of the Canon and his Yeoman is probably an afterthought of Chaucer's, who had very likely himself suffered at the hands of some such impostor.

things as made the Canon set spurs to his horse and "flee away for very sorrow and shame." The Yeoman is now only too glad to make a clean breast of it. He has been seven years with this monastic alchemist, who has fallen meanwhile from one degree of poverty to another; half-cheat, half-dupe, with a thousand tricks for cozening folk of their money, but always wasting his own on the search for the philosopher's stone. Meanwhile, after ruinous expenses and painful care, every experiment ends in the same way: "the pot to-breaketh, and farewell, all is go!" The experimenters pick themselves up, look round on the mass of splinters and the dinted walls, and begin to quarrel over the cause—

Some said it was along on the fire making,
Some saidë Nay, it was on the blowing,
(Then was I feared, for that was mine office,)
'Straw!' quoth the third, 'ye be lewëd and nice [ignorant and foolish
It was not tempered as it ought to be.'
'Nay,' quoth the fourthë, 'stint and hearken me;
Because our fire ne was not made of beech,
That is the cause, and other none, so I theech!' [so may I thrive!

At last the mess is swept up, the few recognizable fragments of metal are put aside for further use, another furnace is built, and the indefatigable Canon concocts a fresh hell-broth, sweeping away all past failures with the incurable optimism of a monomaniac, "There was defect in somewhat, well I wot." Many of the fraternity, however, are arrant knaves, without the least redeeming leaven of folly; and the Yeoman goes on to tell the tricks by which such an one beguiled a "sotted priest" who had set his heart on this unlawful gain.

By this time the company was come to "Bob Up and Down," which was probably the pilgrims' nickname for Upper Harbledown. Here our Host found the Cook straggling behind, asleep on his nag in broad daylight—

'Awake, thou Cook,' quoth he, 'God give thee sorrow!
What aileth thee to sleepë by the morrow?
Hast thou had fleas all night, or art thou drunk?'

The Cook opens his mouth, and at once compels his neighbours to adopt the latter and less charitable theory. He is evidently in no state for story-telling; so the Manciple offers himself instead, not without a few broad jests at his fellow's infirmity—

> And with this speech the Cook was wroth and wraw, [indignant
> And on the manciple he 'gan noddë fast
> For lack of speech; and down the horse him cast,
> Where as he lay till that men up him took!

The Manciple, fearing lest the Cook's resentment should prompt some future revenge in the way of business, pulled out a gourd of wine, coaxed another draught into the drunken man, and earned his half-articulate gratitude. Then he told the fable of the crow from Ovid's Metamorphoses.

The tale was ended, and the sun began to sink, for it was four o'clock.* The cavalcade began to "enter at a thorpë's end"—no doubt the village of Harbledown, the last before Canterbury, famous for the Black Prince's Well and for the relics of St. Thomas at its leper hospital. Here at last the pilgrims remember the real object of their journey. The Host lays aside his oaths (all but one, "Cokkës bones!" which slips out unawares) and looks round now for the hitherto neglected Parson, upon whom he calls for a "fable."

> This Parson answered all at once
> 'Thou gettest fable none y-told for me,
> For Paul, that writeth unto Timothee,
> Reproveth them that weyven soothfastness [depart from
> And tellen fables and such wretchedness . . .
> I cannot gestë "*rum, ram, ruf*" by letter,†
> Nor, God wot, rhyme hold I but little better;
> And therefore if you list—I will not glose—
> I will you tell a merry tale in prose

* There is, as Prof. Skeat points out, an inconsistency here in the text. We can see from Group H., l. 16 that Chaucer had at one time meant the Manciple's tale to be told in the morning; yet now when it is ended he tells us plainly that it is four in the afternoon (Group I., 5).

† An allusion to the alliterative verse popular among the common folk, like that of "Piers Plowman."

To knit up all this feast, and make an end ;
And Jesu, for His gracë, wit me send
To shewë you the way, in this voyage,
Of thilkë perfect, glorious pilgrimage
That hight Jerusalem celestial . . .'
Upon this word we have assented soon,
For as us seemed, it was for to doon [right to do
To enden in some virtuous sentence,
And for to give him space and audience.

The Host voices the common consent, reinforcing his speech for once with a prayer instead of an oath. The Parson then launches out into a treatise on the Seven Deadly Sins and their remedies, translated from the French of a 13th-century friar. The treatise (like Chaucer's other prose writings) lacks the style of his verse ; but it contains one lively and amusing chapter of his own insertion, satirizing the extravagance of costume in his day (lines 407 ff.).

Long before the Parson had ended, the city must have been in full view below—white-walled, red-roofed amid its orchards and green meadows, but lacking that perfect bell-tower which, from far and near, is now the fairest sight of all. At this point an anonymous and far inferior poet has continued Chaucer's narrative in the "Tale of Beryn." The prologue to that tale shows us the pilgrims putting up at the Chequers Inn, "that many a man doth know," fragments of which may still be seen close to the Cathedral at the corner of Mercery Lane.* Travelling as they did in force—and especially with such redoubtable champions among their party—they would no doubt have been able to choose this desirable hostel without too great molestation ; but in favour of less able-bodied pilgrims the city authorities were obliged to pass a law that no hosteler should

* It was mostly destroyed by fire in 1865. Most writers on Canterbury, misled by the ancient spelling, call the inn "Chequers of the Hope." *Hope*, as Prof. Skeat has long ago pointed out, is simply *Hoop*, a part of the inn sign. Cf. Riley, "Memorials of London," pp. 497, 524 ; and "Hist. MSS. Commission," Report v., pt. i., p. 448.

"disturb no manner of strange man coming to the city for to take his inn; but it shall be lawful to take his inn at his own lust without disturbance of any hosteler." * In the Cathedral itself—

> The Pardoner and the Miller, and other lewd sots,
> Sought themselves in the church right as lewd goats,
> Peerëd fast and porëd high upon the glass,
> Counterfeiting gentlemen, the armës for to blase, [blazon

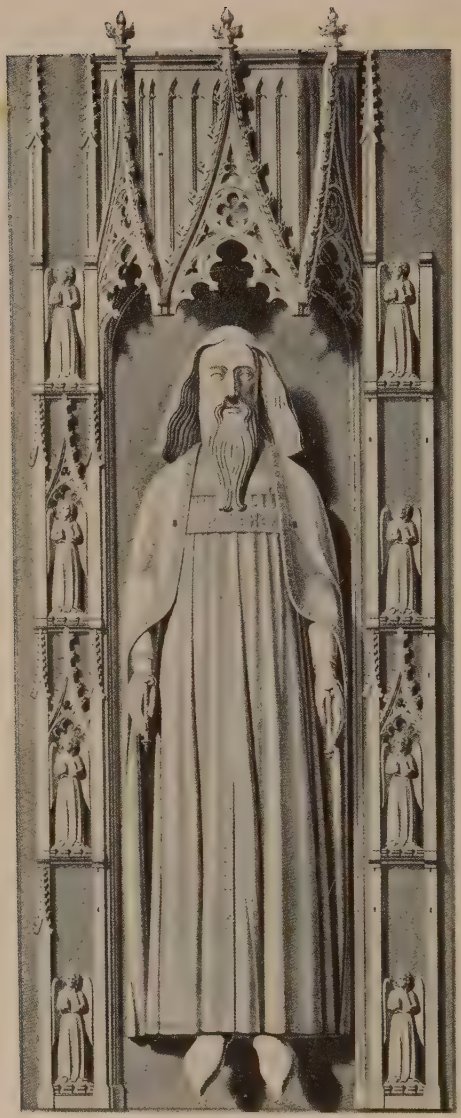
till the Host bade them show better manners, and go offer at the shrine. "Then passed they forth boisterously, goggling with their heads," kissed the relics dutifully, saw the different holy places, and presently sat down to dinner. How the Miller (being accustomed to such sleight of hand) stole afterwards a bosom-full of "Canterbury brooches"; how uproarious was the merriment after supper, and how the Pardoner became the hero of a scandalous adventure—this and much more may be read at length in the prologue to the "Tale of Beryn." It will already have been noted, however, that the anonymous poet entirely agrees with Chaucer in laying stress on what may be called the bank-holiday side of the pilgrimage. That side does indeed come out with rather more than its due prominence when we thus skip the separate tales and run straight through the plot of the pilgrims' journey; but, when all allowances have been made, Chaucer enables us to understand why orthodox preachers spoke on this subject almost as strongly as the heresiarch Wycliffe; and, on the other hand, how great a gap was made in the life of the common folk by the abolition of pilgrimages.

The very fidelity with which the poet paints his own time shows us the Reformation in embryo. We have in fact here, within the six hundred pages of the "Canterbury Tales," one of the most vivid and significant of all scenes in the great Legend of the Ages; and his pilgrims, so intent upon the present, so exactly

* Mrs. Green, "Town Life," ii., 33.

mirrored by Chaucer as they moved and spoke in their own time, tell us nevertheless both of another age that was almost past and of a future time which was not yet ripe for reality. The Knight is still of course the most respected figure in such a company; and he brings into the book a pale afterglow of the real crusades; but the Host now treads close upon his heels, big with the importance of a prosperous citizen who has twice sat in Parliament side by side with knights of the shire. The good Prioress recalls faintly the heroic age of monasticism; yet St. Benedict and St. Francis would have recognized their truest son in the poor Parson, whose puritanism brought him into such vehement suspicion of heresy, and upon whom the pilgrims called only in the last resort.* The Monk and the Friar, the Summoner and the Pardoner, do indeed remind us how large a share the Church claimed in every department of daily life; but they make us ask at the same time "how long can it last?" Extremes meet; and the "lewd sots" who went "goggling with their heads," gaping and disputing at the painted windows on their way to the shrine, were lineal ancestors to the notorious "Blue Dick" of 250 years later, who made a merit of having mounted on a lofty ladder, pike in hand, to "rattle down proud Becket's glassie bones."

* It was actually one of the counts in 1405 against the priest Richard Wyche, sometime Vicar of Deptford, who was finally burned on Tower Hill in 1440, that he had maintained "men and women on pilgrimage should always converse with each other concerning Holy Scripture": a sentiment which Chaucer's Parson might well have uttered. Another of Wyche's condemned expressions was practically identical with that of Berthold v. Regensburg, quoted above on p. 141 (*Fasc. Zizaniorum*, R.S. p. 502).



EDWARD III, FROM HIS TOMB IN
WESTMINSTER ABBEY

CHAPTER XIV

KING AND QUEEN

"Then came there a King; knighthood him led;
Might of the Commons made him to reign."
"Piers Plowman," B., Prol. 112

WE have traced the main course of the poet's life, followed him at work and at play, and considered his immediate environment. Let us now try to roam more at large through the England of his day, and note the more salient features of that society, high and low, from which he drew his characters.

In this age, Chaucer could scarcely have had a better introduction to Court life than that which fell to his lot. The King whom he served, when we have made all possible deductions, was still the most imposing sovereign of the time. Adam Murimuth, a contemporary chronicler not often given to rhetoric, has drawn Edward III.'s portrait with no more exaggeration than we must take for granted in a contemporary, and with such brilliancy that his more picturesque successor, Walsingham, has transferred the paragraph almost bodily into his own pages. "This King Edward," writes Adam, "was of infinite goodness, and glorious among all the great ones of the world, being entitled The Glorious par excellence, for that by virtue of grace from heaven he outshone in excellence all his predecessors, renowned and noble as they were. He was so great-hearted that he never blenched or changed the fashion of his countenance at any ill-hap or trouble soever that came upon him; a renowned and fortunate warrior, who triumphed gloriously in battles by sea

and land; clement and benign, familiar and gentle even to all men, both strangers and his own subjects or dependents; devoted to God, for he held God's Church and His ministers in the greatest reverence. In temporal matters he was not too unyielding, prudent and discreet in counsel, affable and gentle in courtesy of speech, composed and measured in gesture and manners, pitiful to the afflicted, and profuse in largesse. In times of wealth he was not immoderate; his love of building was great and discriminating; he bore losses with moderation; devoted to hawking, he spent much pains on that art. His body was comely, and his face like the face of a god, wherefrom so marvellous grace shone forth that whosoever openly considered his countenance, or dreamed thereof by night, conceived a sure and certain hope of pleasant solace and good-fortune that day. He ruled his realm strictly even to his old age; he was liberal in giving and lavish in spending; for he was excellent in all honour of manners, so that to live under him was to reign; since his fame was so spread abroad among barbarous nations that, extolling his honour, they averred that no land under the sun had ever produced a King so noble, so generous, or so fortunate; and that, after his death, none such would perchance ever be raised up for future times. Yet he controlled not, even in old age, the dissolute lusts of the flesh; and, as is believed, this intemperance shortened his life." Hereupon follows a painfully involved sentence in which the chronicler draws a moral from Edward's brilliant youth, the full midday of his manhood, and the degradation of his declining years.*

If the praise of Edward's clemency seems overdrawn to those who remember the story of the citizens of Calais, we must bear in mind that the chronicler compares him here with other sovereigns of the time—with his rival Philippe de Valois, who was scarcely

* A. Murimuth, ed. Hog., p. 225.

dissuaded from executing Sir Walter de Mauny in cold blood, despite his safe conduct from the Dauphin; with Gaston de Foix, who with a penknife in his hand struck at his only son and killed him; with Richard II., who smote the Earl of Arundel in the face during the Queen's funeral, and "polluted Westminster Abbey with his blood"; with Charles the Bad of Navarre, and Pedro the Cruel of Spain. What even the cleric Murimuth saw, and what Chaucer and his friend Hoccleve saw still more intimately, was the Haroun al-Raschid who went about "in simple array alone" to hear what his people said of him; the "mighty victor, mighty lord" of Sluys, Crécy and Calais; the King who in war would freely hazard his own person, "raging like a wild boar, and crying 'Ha Saint Edward! Ha Saint George!'"* and who in peace would lead the revels at Windsor, clad in white and silver, and embroidered with his motto—

> Hay, hay, the whitë swan!
> By Goddës soul I am thy man!

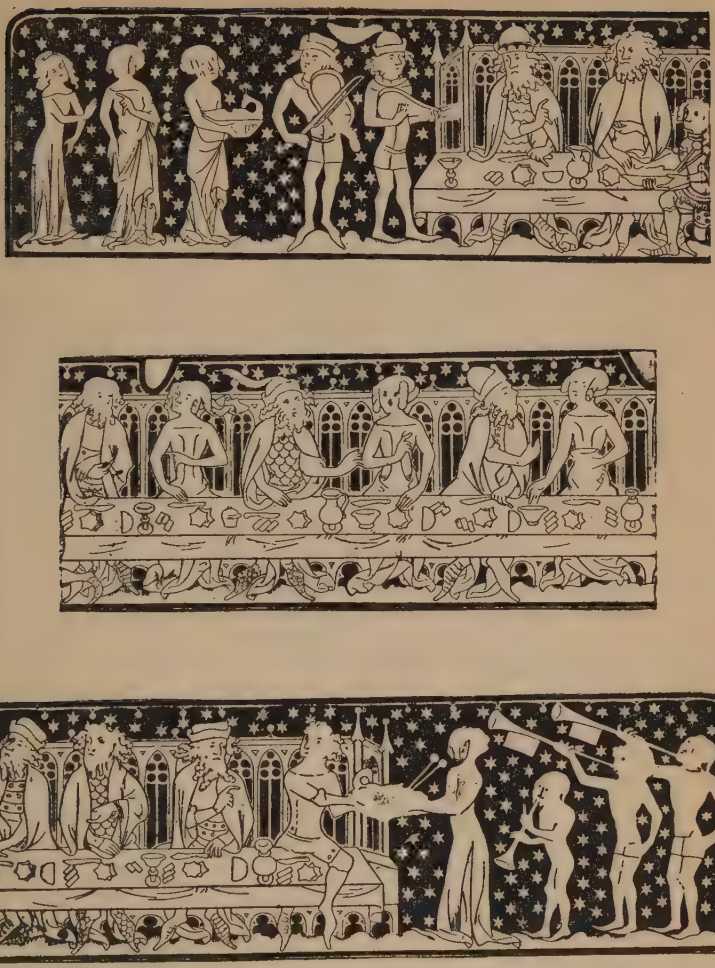
If Edward and his sons were renowned for their uniform success in battle, it was not because they had feared to look defeat in the face. Every one knows how much was risked and all but lost at Crécy and Poitiers; the great sea-fight of "Les Espagnols sur Mer" is less known. Froissart excels himself in this story.† We see Edward sailing out gaily, in spite of the superior numbers of the Spaniards, and bidding his minstrels pipe the brand-new air which Sir John Chandos had brought back from Germany, while Chandos himself sang the words. Then, when the enemy came sailing down upon him with their great embattled ships, the King bade his steersman tilt straight at the first Spanish vessel, in spite of the disparity of weight. The English boat cracked under the shock; her seams opened; and,

* Walsingham, an. 1349; Hoccleve, E.E.T.S., vol. iii., p. 93.
† Ed. Buchon, i., 286; ed. Luce, iv., 327.

by the time that Edward had captured the next ship, his own was beginning to sink. The Black Prince had even a narrower escape; it became evident that his ship would go down before he could board the enemy; only the timely arrival of the Earl of Derby saved him; the deck sank almost under his feet as he climbed the sides of the Spaniard; "and all the enemy were put overboard without taking any to mercy." The Queen prayed all day at some abbey—probably Battle—in anguish of heart for the news which came from time to time through watchers on the far-off Downs. Although Edward and his sons took horse at once upon their landing, not until two o'clock in the morning did they find her, apparently in her own castle at Pevensey: "so the lords and ladies passed that night in great revel, speaking of war and of love."

Arms and love were equally commemorated in a foundation which was one of the glories of Edward's reign—the Round Tower of Windsor. Dying chivalry, like other moribund institutions, broke out now and then into fantastic revivals of the past. Edward resolved to hold a Round Table at his palace, and to build a great tower for the purpose. Warrants were sent out to impress the unhappy labourers throughout six counties; for a short time as many as 722 men were employed on the work, and the whole Round Tower was built in ten months of the year 1344.* Froissart connects this, probably too closely, with the Order of the Garter, which seems not to have been actually founded until 1349, when every household in the country was saddened by the Great Pestilence. We have here one of the typical contrasts of those times; both sides of the shield are seen in those memories of love and war which cling round the Round Tower of Windsor. Lavish profusion side by side with dirt and squalor; the minstrels clad in rich cloths taken from

* Longman, "Edward III.," i., 225, 413.



THE PEACOCK FEAST

(From the sepulchral brass of Robert Braunche, twice Mayor of Lynn, who died in 1364. Braunche had the honour of entertaining Edward III., here distinguished by his crown on the extreme left of the guests. Observe the attitude of the attendant squire on the extreme right.)

the Spaniards; bright eyes and careless merriment at the Royal board, while the hawks scream down from their perches, and noble hounds fight for bones among the rushes; silken trains, stiff with gold, trailing over the nameless defilements of the floor; a King and his sons, more stately and warlike than any other Royal family; but their crowns are in pawn with foreign merchants, and they themselves have been obliged to leave four earls behind as hostages to their Flemish creditors.* Royalty has always its *memento mori*, no doubt, but not always under the same forms.

If Chaucer the poet was fortunate in his Royal master, still more fortunate was Philippa Chaucer in her namesake, "the good Queen." The wooing of Edward and Philippa of Hainault is painted lovingly by Froissart, who was the lady's compatriot and a clerk in her service. In 1326 Queen Isabella of England, who had broken more or less definitely with her husband, was staying with her eldest boy at her brother's Court in Paris. But the King of France had no wish to encourage open rebellion; and Isabella avoided extradition only by fleeing to her cousin, the Count of Hainault, at Valenciennes. "In those days had Count William four daughters, Margaret, Philippa, Joan, and Isabel; among whom young Edward devoted himself most, and inclined with eyes of love to Philippa rather than to the rest; and the maiden knew him better and kept closer company with him than any of her sisters. So have I since heard from the mouth of the good Lady herself, who was Queen of England, and in whose court and service I dwelt." It was agreed, in reward for the count's hospitality, that Edward should marry one of the girls; and when Isabella went home to conquer England in her son's name, the main body of her army consisted of Hainaulters, and most of the prepaid dowry of the future bride was consumed by the expenses of the

* Longman, "Edward III.," vol. i., pp. 147, 157, 178.

expedition. Then, in 1327, when the wretched Edward II. had bitterly expiated his follies and crimes in the dungeon of Berkeley, and the "she-wolf of France" already ruled England in her son's name, she went through the form of asking whether he would marry one of the young countesses. "And when they asked him, he began to laugh, and said, 'Yes, I am better pleased to marry there than elsewhere; and rather to Philippa, for she and I accorded excellently well together; and she wept, I know well, when I took leave of her at my departure.'" All that was needed now was a papal dispensation; for the parties were second cousins. This was, of course, a mere matter of form—or, rather, of money. Towards the end of the year Philippa was married by proxy at Valenciennes; and on December 23 she arrived in London, where there were "great rejoicings and noble show of lords, earls, barons, knights, highborn ladies and noble damsels, with rich display of dress and jewels, with jousts too and tourneys for the ladies' love, with dancing and carolling, and with great and rich feasts day by day; and these rejoicings endured for the space of 3 weeks." Edward was at York, resting after his first Scottish campaign; so "the young queen and her meinie journeyed northwards until they came to York, where she was received with great solemnity. And all the lords of England who were in the city came forth in fair array to meet her, and with them the young king, mounted on an excellently-paced hackney, magnificently clad and arrayed; and he took her by the hand, and then embraced and kissed her; and so riding side by side, with great plenty of minstrels and honours, they entered the city and came to the Queen's lodgings. . . . So there the young King Edward wedded Philippa of Hainault in the cathedral church of St. William [*sic*]. . . . And the king was seventeen years of age, and the young queen was on the point of fourteen years. . . . Thus came the said queen Philippa to England at so happy a time that the whole kingdom might well rejoice thereat,

and did indeed rejoice; for since the days of queen Guinevere, who was wife to King Arthur and queen of England (which men called Great Britain in those days), so good a queen never came to that land, nor any who had so much honour, or such fair offspring; for in her time, by King Edward her spouse, she had seven sons and five daughters. And, so long as she lived, the realm of England enjoyed grace, prosperity, honour, and all good fortune; nor was there ever enduring famine or dearth in the land while she reigned there. . . . Tall and straight she was; wise, gladsome, humble, devout, free-handed, and courteous; and in her time she was richly adorned with all noble virtues, and well beloved of God and men." *

So far Froissart, recording events which happened some ten years before his birth, from the mouths of the actors themselves; writing lovingly, in his extreme old age, of his first and noblest patroness, and proudly as a Dane might write thirty years hence of the princess who had come from his own home to win all hearts in England.† From other chroniclers, and from dry official documents, we may throw interesting sidelights on these more living memorials. One such document, however, is as living as a page from Froissart himself, in spite of—or shall we say, because of?—its essentially business character and the legal caution of phrase in which the writer has wrapped up his direct personal impressions. The official register of the ill-fated Bishop Stapledon, of Exeter, so soon to expiate at the hands of a London mob his loyal ministerial service to

* Ed. Buchon, i., 12, 34; ed. Luce, i., 284–287.

† Cf. Darmesteter, "Froissart," p. 16, and Froissart, ed. Buchon, p. 512. "The good queen Philippa was in my youth my queen and sovereign. I was five years at the court of the King and Queen of England. In my youth I was her clerk, serving her with fair ditties and treatises of love; and, for the love of the noble and worthy lady my mistress, all other great lords—king, dukes, earls, barons and knights, of whatsoever country they might be—loved me and saw me gladly and gave me much profit."

PHILIPPA OF HAINAULT, FROM HER TOMB IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

(THE FIRST OF THE ROYAL TOMBS WHICH IS AN ACTUAL PORTRAIT)

Edward II., is in the main like other episcopal registers—a record of ordinations, institutions, dispensations, lawsuits, and more or less unsuccessful attempts to reduce his clergy to canonical discipline.* But it contains, under the date of 1319 (p. 169), an entry which has, so far as I know, been strangely overlooked hitherto by historians. The Latin title runs, "Inspection and Description of the Daughter of the Count of Hainault, Philippa by name." To this a later hand, probably that of the succeeding bishop, has added: "She was Queen of England, Wife to Edward III." The document itself, which is in Norman-French, runs as follows: "The lady whom we saw has not uncomely hair, betwixt blue-black and brown. Her head is clean-shaped; her forehead high and broad, and standing somewhat forward. Her face narrows between the eyes, and the lower part of her face still more narrow and slender than the forehead. Her eyes are blackish-brown and deep. Her nose is fairly smooth and even, save that it is somewhat broad at the tip and also flattened, yet it is no snub-nose. Her nostrils are also broad, her mouth fairly wide. Her lips somewhat full, and especially the lower lip. Her teeth which have fallen and grown again are white enough, but the rest are not so white. The lower teeth project a little beyond the upper; yet this is but little seen. Her ears and chin are comely enough. Her neck, shoulders, and all her body and lower limbs are reasonably well shapen; all her limbs are well set and unmaimed; and nought is amiss so far as a man may see. Moreover, she is brown of skin all over, and much like her father; and in all things she is pleasant enough, as it seems to us. And the damsel will be of the age of nine years on St. John's day next

* I cannot refrain here from calling attention to the extraordinary historical value of the eight volumes of Exeter registers published by Prebendary Hingeston-Randolph, who in this department has done more for historical students, during the last twenty-five years, than all the learned societies of the kingdom put together.

to come, as her mother saith. She is neither too tall nor too short for such an age; she is of fair carriage, and well taught in all that becometh her rank, and highly esteemed and well beloved of her father and mother and of all her meinie, in so far as we could inquire and learn the truth." Cannot we here see, through the bishop's dry and measured phrases, a figure scarcely less living and attractive than Froissart shows us?

But the register corrects the historian just where we should expect to find him at fault. "The noble and worthy lady my mistress" would scarcely have told Froissart how much State policy there had been in the marriage, true love-match as it had been in spite of all. The old bishop, before whose face she had trembled, and laughed again behind his back with her sisters; his invidious comparisons between her first and second teeth; his business-like collection of backstairs gossip, which some more confidential maid-of-honour must surely have whispered to her mistress—of all this the noble lady naturally breathed no syllable to her devoted clerk. But, apart from the official record in the secret archives of Exeter diocese, a vague memory of it all was kept alive in men's minds by that most efficacious of historical preservatives—a broad jest. The rhyming chronicler Hardyng, whose life overlapped Froissart's and Chaucer's by several years, records a good deal of Court gossip, especially about Edward III.'s family. He writes *—

> "He sent forth then to Hainault for a wife
> A bishop and other lordës temporal,
> Where, in chamber privy and secret
> At discovered, dishevelled also in all,
> As seeming was to estate virginal.
> Among themselves our lords, for his prudence
> Of the bishop asked counsel and sentence.

* Ed. 1812, p. 317. The text of this book is frequently corrupt; but the evident sense of these ungrammatical lines 3–5 is that the envoys were allowed to watch the unsuspecting damsels from some hidden coign

"Which daughter of the five should be the queen.
Who counselled thus, with sad avisëment
'We will have her with good hippës, I mean,
For she will bear good sons, to mine intent.'
To which they all accorded by assent,
And chose Philippa that was full feminine,
As the bishop most wise did determine.

"But then among themselves they laughed fast ay;
The lords then said [that] the bishop couth [was a good judge
Full mickle skill of a woman alway,
That so could choose a lady that was uncouth; [unknown
And, for the merry words that came of his mouth,
They trowed he had right great experience
Of woman's rule and their convenience."

Later on again, after enumerating the titles and virtues of the sons that were born of this union, Hardyng continues—

"So high and large they were of all stature,
The least of them was of [his] person able
To have foughten with any creature
Single battaile in actës merciable;
The bishop's wit me thinketh commendable,
So well could choose the princess that them bore,
For by practice he knew it, or by lore."

We need find no difficulty in reconciling Froissart with these other documents; Edward's was a love-match, but, like all Royal love-matches, subject to possible considerations of State. The first negotiations for a papal dispensation carefully avoid exact specification; the request is simply for leave to marry "one of the daughters" of Hainault; only two months before the actual marriage does the final document bear Philippa's name.

The Queen's public life—the scene before Calais, and her (somewhat doubtful) presence at the battle of Nevile's Cross—belongs rather to the general history of England; of her private life, as of Chaucer's, a great deal only flashes out here and there, meteor-wise, from

of vantage. It will be noted that Hardyng speaks of *five* daughters; there had been five, but the eldest was now dead.

account-books and similar business documents. We find, for instance, what gifts were given to the messengers who announced the births of her successive children to the King; and Beltz, in his "Memorials of the Garter," has unearthed the name of the lady who nursed the Black Prince.* We find Edward building for his young consort the castle since called Queenborough, the master-mason on this occasion being John Gibbon, ancestor to the great historian. At another moment we see the Earl of Oxford, as Chamberlain, claiming for his perquisites after the coronation Philippa's bed, shoes, and three silver basins; but Edward redeemed the bed for £1000.† This redemption is explained by divers entries in the Royal accounts; in 1335-6 the King owed John of Cologne £3000 for a bed made "against the confinement of the Lady Philippa . . . of green velvet, embroidered in gold, with red sirens, bearing a shield with the arms of England and Hainault." The infant on this occasion was the short-lived William of Hatfield, whose child-tomb may be seen in York Cathedral. Her carpets for a later confinement cost £900, but her bed only £1250. And so on to the latest entries of all—the carving of her tomb at Westminster; the wrought-iron hearse which the canons of St. Paul's obligingly took from the tomb of Bishop Northbrooke and sold for that of the Queen at the price of £600;‡ lastly, the rich "mortuary" accruing

* Ed. 1841, p. 206. She was Katherine, daughter to Sir Adam Banastre. Miss Strickland asserts that the Queen, contrary to the custom of medieval ladies in high life, nursed the infant herself. She gives no reference, and her authority is possibly Joshua Barnes's "Life of Edward III." (1688), p. 44, where, however, references are again withheld. The Black Prince was born June 15, 1330, when the King would have been 19 and the Queen just on 16 years old according to Froissart; but Edward was in fact only 17, and Bishop Stapledon's reckoning would make the Queen about the same age.

† Throughout this chapter I multiply the ancient money by fifteen, to bring it to modern value.

‡ Such acts of vandalism were far more common in the Middle Ages than is generally imagined; a good many instances are noted in the index of my "From St. Francis to Dante."

to the Chapter of York Minster, who got for their perquisite the bed on which Philippa had breathed her last, and had its rich hangings cut up into "thirteen copes, six tunics and one chasuble." *

But here let us turn back to Froissart, who, under the year 1369, turns suddenly aside from his chronicle of battles and sieges, to pay a heartfelt tribute to his first benefactress. "Now let us speak of the death of the gentlest queen, the most liberal and courteous of all who reigned in her time, my Lady Philippa of Hainault, queen of England and Ireland: God pardon her and all others! In these days . . . there came to pass in England a thing common enough, but exceedingly pitiful this time for the king and her children and the whole land; for the good lady the Queen of England, who had done so much good in her lifetime and succoured so many knights, ladies, and damsels, and given and distributed so freely among all people, and who had ever loved so naturally those of her own native land of Hainault, lay grievously sick in the castle of Windsor; and her sickness lay so hard upon her that it waxed more and more grievous, and her last end drew near. When therefore this good lady and queen knew that she must die, she sent for the king her husband; and, when he was come into her presence, she drew her right hand from under the coverlet and put it into the right hand of the king, who was sore grieved in his heart; and thus spake the good lady: 'My Lord, heaven be thanked that we have spent our days in peace and joy and prosperity; wherefore I pray that you will grant me three boons at this my departure.' The King, weeping and sobbing, answered and said, 'Ask, Lady, for they are granted.' 'My Lord, I pray for all sorts of good folk with whom in time past I have dealt for their

* Devon, "Issues of the Exchequer," pp. 144, 153, 155, 199; "York Fabric Rolls," p. 125; cf. 154. It was one of the privileges of the Archbishops of York to crown the Queen. For the mortuary system, see my "Priests and People in Medieval England." (Simpkins. 1s.)

merchandize, both on this and on that side of the sea, that ye will easily trust their word for that wherein I am bound to them, and pay full quittance for me. Next, that ye will keep and accomplish all ordinances which I have made, and all legacies which I have bequeathed, both to churches on either side of the sea where I have paid my devotions, and to the squires and damsels who have served me. Thirdly, my Lord, I pray that ye will choose no other sepulture than to lie by my side in the Abbey of Westminster, when God's will shall be done on you.' The King answered weeping, 'Lady, I grant it you.' Then made the Queen the sign of the true cross on him, and commended the King to God, and likewise the lord Thomas her youngest son, who was by her side; and then within a brief space she yielded up her ghost, which (as I firmly believe) the holy angels of paradise seized and carried with great joy to the glory of heaven; for never in her life did she nor thought she any thing whereby she might lose it."

As the good Queen's beloved bed-hangings were dispersed in fragments among the Canons of York, so her dying benedictions would seem to have been scattered no less widely to the winds. One of the servants so tenderly commended to the King's care was Chaucer's wife; but another was Alice Perrers, whom Edward had already noted with favour, and who now took more or less openly the dead Queen's place. Men aged rapidly in those days; and, as Edward trod the descending slope of life, his manly will weakened and left little but the animal behind. Philippa was scarcely cold in her grave when Alice Perrers, decked in her mistress's jewels, was masquerading at royal tournaments as the Lady of the Sun. Presently she was sitting openly at the judge's side in the law courts; the King's shame was the common talk of his subjects; and even the formal protests of Parliament failed to separate her from the doting old King, from whom on his death-bed she kept the clergy away until his speech was gone.

Then, having stolen the very rings from his fingers, she left him to a priest who could only infer repentance from his groans and tears. Thomas of Woodstock, the Queen's Benjamin, fared not much better. He became the selfish and overbearing leader of the opposition to Richard II., and was at last secretly murdered by order of the royal nephew whom he had bullied more or less successfully for twenty years.

CHAPTER XV

KNIGHTS AND SQUIRES

"'But teach me,' quoth the Knight; 'and, by Christ, I will assay!'
'By St. Paul,' quoth Perkin, 'ye proffer you so fair
That I shall work and sweat, and sow for us both,
And other labours do for thy love, all my lifetime,
In covenant that thou keep Holy Church and myself
From wasters and from wicked men, that this world destroy;
And go hunt hardily to hares and foxes,
To boars and to badgers that break down my hedges;
And go train thy falcons wild-fowl to kill,
For such come to my croft and crop my wheat.'"

"Piers Plowman," B., vi., 24

THE theory of chivalry, which itself owes much to pre-Christian morality, lies at the roots of the modern conception of gentility. The essence of perfect knighthood was fearless strength, softened by charity and consecrated by faith. A certain small and select class had (it was held) a hereditary right to all the best things of this world, and the concomitant duty of using with moderation for themselves and giving freely to others. Essentially exclusive and jealous of its privileges, the chivalric ideal was yet the highest possible in a society whose very foundations rested on caste distinctions, and where bondmen were more numerous than freemen. The world will always be the richer for it; but we must not forget that, like the finest flower of Greek and Roman culture, it postulated a servile class; the many must needs toil and groan and bleed in order that the few might have grace and freedom to grow to their individual perfection. In its finest products it may extort unwilling admiration even from the most convinced democrat—

"Often I find myself saying, old faith and doctrine abjuring, . . .
Were it not well that the stem should be naked of leaf and of tendril,
Poverty-stricken, the barest, the dismallest stick of the garden;
Flowerless, leafless, unlovely, for ninety-and-nine long summers,
So in the hundredth, at last, were bloom for one day at the summit,
So but that fleeting flower were lovely as Lady Maria?" *

When, however, we look closer into the system, and turn from theory to practice, then we find again those glaring inconsistencies which meet us nearly everywhere in medieval society. A close study even of such a panegyrist as Froissart compels us to look to some other age than his for the spirit of perfect chivalry; and many writers would place the palmy days of knighthood in the age of St. Louis. Here again, however, we find the same difficulty; for in Joinville himself there are many jarring notes, and other records of the period are still less flattering to knightly society. The most learned of modern apologists for the Middle Ages, Léon Gautier, is driven to put back the Golden Age one century further, thus implying that Francis and Dominic, Aquinas and Dante, the glories of Westminster and Amiens, the saintly King who dealt justice under the oak of Vincennes, and twice led his armies oversea against the heathen, all belonged to an age of decadence in chivalry. Yet, even at this sacrifice, the Golden Age escapes us. When we go back to the middle of the 12th century we find St. Bernard's contemporaries branding the chivalry of their times as shamelessly untrue to its traditional code. "The Order of Knighthood" (writes Peter of Blois in his 94th Epistle) "is nowadays mere disorder. . . . Knights of old bound themselves by an oath to stand by the state, not to flee from battle, and to prefer the public welfare to their own lives. Nay, even in these present days candidates for knighthood take their swords from the altar as a confession that they are sons of the Church, and that the blade is

* Clough, "Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich."

given to them for the honour of the priesthood, the defence of the poor, the chastisement of evil-doers, and the deliverance of their country. But all goes by contraries; for nowadays, from the moment when they are honoured with the knightly belt, they rise up against the Lord's anointed and rage against the patrimony of the Crucified. They rob and despoil Christ's poor, afflicting the wretched miserably and without mercy, that from other men's pain they may gratify their unlawful appetites and their wanton pleasures. . . . They who should have used their strength against Christ's enemies fight now in their cups and drunkenness, waste their time in sloth, moulder in debauchery, and dishonour the name and office of Knighthood by their degenerate lives." This was about 1170. A couple of generations earlier we get an equally unfavourable impression from the learned and virtuous abbot, Guibert of Nogent. Further back, again, the evidence is still more damning; and nobody would seriously seek the golden age of chivalry in the 11th century. It is indeed a mirage; and Peter of Blois in 1170, Cardinal Jacques de Vitry in 1220, who so disadvantageously contrasted the knighthood of their own time with that of the past, were simply victims of a common delusion. They despaired too lightly of the actual world, and sought refuge too credulously in an imaginary past. Even if, in medieval fashion, we trace this institution back to Romulus, to David, to Joshua, or to Adam himself, we shall, after all, find it nowhere more flourishing than in the first half of the 13th century, imperfectly as its code was kept even then.

By the end of that century, however, two great causes were at work which made for the decay of chivalry. Before Dante had begun to write, the real Crusades were over—or, indeed, even before Dante was born—for the two expeditions led by St. Louis were small compared with others in the past. In 1229 the Emperor Frederick II. had recovered from the infidel

by treaty those holy places which Coeur-de-Lion had in vain attempted to storm; and this had dealt a severe blow to the old traditions. Again, during the years that followed, the Pope did not hesitate to attack his enemy the Emperor, even in the Holy Land; so that, while Christian fought against Christian over Christ's grave, the Turk stepped in and reconquered Jerusalem (1244). Lastly, his successors, while they regularly raised enormous taxes and contributions for the reconquest of Palestine, systematically spent them on their own private ambitions or personal pleasures. Before the 13th century was out the last Christian fortress had been taken, and there was nothing now to show for two centuries of bloodshed. Under these repeated shocks men began to lose faith in the crusading principle. A couple of generations before Chaucer's birth, Etienne de Bourbon complained that the upper classes "not only did not take the cross, but scoffed at the lower orders when they did so" (p. 174). In France, after the disastrous failure of St. Louis's first expedition, the rabble said that Mahomet was now stronger than Christ.* Edward III. and his rival, Philippe de Valois, did for a moment propose to go and free the Holy Land in concert, but hardly seriously. Chaucer's Knight had indeed fought in Asia Minor, but mainly against European pagans in Spain and on the shores of the Baltic; and, irreproachable as his motives were in this particular instance, Gower shows scant sympathy for those which commonly prompted crusades of this kind.†

A still more fatal cause of the decay of chivalry, perhaps, lay in the growing prosperity of the merchant class. Even distinguished historians have written misleadingly concerning the ideal of material prosperity and middle-class comfort, as though it had been born only with the Reformation. It seems in fact an inseparable

* "Mon. Germ. Scriptt.," xxxii., 444. † "Mirour," 23893 ff.

bye-product of civilization: whether healthy or unhealthy need not be discussed here. As the Dark Ages brightened into the Middle Ages, as mere club-law grew weaker and weaker, so the longing for material comforts grew stronger and stronger. The great monasteries were among the leaders in this as in so many other respects. In 12th-century England, the nearest approach to the comfort of a modern household would probably have been found either in rich Jews' houses or in the more favoured parts of abbeys like Bury and St. Albans. Already in the 13th century the merchant class begins to come definitely to the fore. As the early 14th-century *Renart le Contrefait* complains—

> "Bourgeois du roi est pair et comte ;
> De tous états portent l'honneur.
> Riches bourgeois sont bien seigneurs !" *

Italy and the south of France were particularly advanced in this respect; and Dante's paternal house was probably richer in material comforts than any castle or palace in England, as his surroundings were in many other ways more civilized. Even the feudal aristocracy, as will presently be seen, learned much in these ways from the citizen-class: and, meanwhile, a slow but sure intermingling process began between the two classes themselves. First only by way of abuse, but presently by open procedure of law, the rich plebeian began to buy for himself the sacred rank of Knighthood. Long before the end of the 13th century, there were districts of France in which rich citizens claimed knighthood as their inalienable right. In England, the order was cheapened by Edward I.'s statute of *Distraint of Knighthood* (1278), in which some have seen a deliberate purpose to undermine the feudal nobility. By this law, all freeholders possessing an estate of £20 a year were not only permitted, but compelled to become knights; and the superficiality of the strict chivalric ideal is shown clearly by the facts

* Lénient, "Satire en France" (1859), p. 202.

that such a law could ever be passed, and that men tried so persistently to evade it. If knighthood had been in reality, even at the end of the 12th century, anything like what its formal codes represent, then no such attempt as this could have been made in 1235 by a King humbly devoted to the Church—for, as early as that year, Henry III. had anticipated his son's enactments.

Where Royal statutes and popular tendencies work together against an ancient institution, it soon begins to crumble away; and the knighthood which Chaucer knew was far removed from that of a few generations before. We read in "Piers Plowman" that, while "poor gentle blood" is refused, "soapsellers and their sons for silver have been knights." An Italian contemporary, Sacchetti, complains that he has seen knighthood conferred on "mechanics, artisans, even bakers; nay, worse still, on woolcarders, usurers, and cozening ribalds"; and Eustache Deschamps speaks scarcely less strongly.* Several 14th-century mayors of London were knighted, including John Chaucer's fellow-vintner Picard, and Geoffrey's colleagues at the Customs, Walworth, Brembre, and Philipot.

But Brembre and Philipot, Sir Walter Besant has reminded us, were probably members of old country families, who had come to seek their fortunes in London.† True; but this only shows us the decay of chivalry on another side. Nothing could be more honourable, or better in the long run for the country, than that there should be such a double current of circulation, fresh healthy blood flowing from the country manor to the London counting-house, and hard cash trickling back again from the city to the somewhat impoverished manor. It was magnificent, but it was not chivalry, at any rate in the medieval sense. Gower

* Sacchetti, "Novelle," cliii.; Ste-Palaye, "Chevalerie," ii., 80.

† Mr. Rye (*l. c.*) points out how frequent was the interchange between London and Lynn. Another colleague of John Chaucer's, John de Stodey, Mayor and Sheriff of London, had been formerly a taverner at Lynn.

reminded his readers that even civil law forbade the knight to become merchant or trader; but the movement was far too strong to be checked by law. The old families had lost heavily by the crusades, by the natural subdivision of estates, and by their own extravagance. Moreover, the growing luxury of the times made them feel still more acutely the limitation of their incomes; and the moneylenders of Chaucer's day found their best customers among country magnates. "The city usurer," writes Gower, "keeps on hire his brokers and procurers, who search for knights, vavasours and squires. When these have mortgaged their lands, and are driven by need to borrow, then these rascals lead them to the usurers; and presently that trick will be played which in modern jargon is called the *chevisance* of money. . . . Ah! what a bargain, which thus enriches the creditor and will ruin the debtor!" * In an age which knew knight-errantry no longer, nothing but the most careful husbandry could secure the old families in their former pre-eminence; and well it was for England that these were early forced by bitter experience to recognise the essential dignity of honest commerce. Edward I., under the financial pressure of his great wars, insisted that he was "free to buy and sell like any other." All the Kings were obliged to travel from one Royal manor to another, as M. Jusserand has pointed out, from sheer motives of economy.† We have already seen how Edward III., even in his pleasures, kept business accounts with a regularity which earned him a sneer from King John of France. The Cistercians, who were probably the richest religious body in England, owed their wealth mainly to their success in the wool

* "Mirour," 7225: Cf. "Piers Plowman," C., vii., 248. Readers of Chaucer's "Prologue" will remember this mysterious word "chevisance" in connection with the Merchant. Its proper meaning was simply *bargain:* the slang sense will be best understood from a Royal ordinance of 1365 against those who lived by usury; "which kind of contract, the more subtly to deceive the people, they call *exchange*, or *chevisance*."

† "Vie Nomade," pp. 33, 46.

SIR GEOFFREY LOUTTRELL WITH HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER

trade. But perhaps the most curious evidence of this kind may be found in the invaluable collections from the Berkeley papers made in the 17th century by John Smyth of Nibley, and published by the Bristol and Gloucester Archæological Society. We there find a series of great barons, often holding distinguished offices in peace or war, but always exploiting their estates with a dogged unity of purpose which a Lombard might have envied. Thomas I., who held the barony from 1220 to 1243, showed his business foresight by letting a great deal of land on copyhold. His son (1243–1281) was "a careful husband, and strict in all his bargains." This Thomas II., who served with distinction in twenty-eight campaigns, kept in his own hands from thirteen to twenty manors, farming them with the most meticulous care. His accounts show that "when this lord was free from foreign employment, he went often in progress from one of his manors and farmhouses to another, scarce two miles asunder, making his stay at each of them for one or two nights, overseeing and directing the above-mentioned husbandries." Lady Berkeley went on similar rounds from manor to manor in order to inspect the dairies. Smyth gives amusing instances of the baron's frugalities, side by side with his generosity. He followed a policy of sub-letting land in tail to tenants, calculating "that the heirs of such donees being within age should be in ward to him, . . . and so the profit of the land to become his own again, and the value of the marriage also to boot": a calculation which the reader will presently be in a better position to understand. He "would not permit any freeman's widow to marry again unless she first made fine with him" (one poor creature who protested against this rule was fined £20 in modern money); and he fixed a custom, which survived for centuries on his manors, of seizing into his own hands the estates of all copyholders' widows who re-married, or were guilty of incontinence. He vowed a crusade, but never

performed it; his grandson paid a knight £100 to go instead of the dead baron. Lady Berkeley's "elder years were weak and sickly, part of whose physic was sawing of billets and sticks, for which cause she had before her death yearly bought certain fine hand-saws, which she used in her chamber, and which commonly cost twopence a piece."

Maurice III. (1321–1326) continued, or rather improved upon, his father's exact methods. Thomas III. (1326–1361) was almost as great a warrior as his grandfather, though less fortunate. Froissart tells in his own picturesque style how he pressed so far forward at Poitiers as to get himself badly wounded and taken prisoner, and how the squire who took him bought himself a knighthood out of the ransom. (Globe ed., p. 127). Even more significant, perhaps, are the Royal commissions by which this lord was deputed to raise men for the great war, and to which I shall have occasion to refer later on. But, amidst all this public business, Thomas found time to farm himself about eighty manors! Like his grandfather, he was blessed with an equally business-like helpmeet, for when he was abroad on business or war, "his good and frugal lady withdrew herself for the most part to her houses of least resort and receipt, whether for her retirement or frugality, I determine not." The doubt here expressed must be merely rhetorical, for Smyth later on records how she had a new gown made for herself "of cloth furred throughout with coney-skins out of the kitchen." Indeed, most of the cloth and fur for the robes of this great household came from the estate itself. "In each manor, and almost upon each farmhouse, he had a pigeon-house, and in divers manors two, and in Hame and a few others three; from each house he drew yearly great numbers, as 1300, 1200, 1000, 850, 700, 650 from an house; and from Hame in one year 2151 young pigeons." These figures serve to explain how the baronial pigeons, preying on the crops, and so sacred that no man might touch

them on pain of life or limb, became one of the chief causes which precipitated the French Revolution. Like his grandfather—and indeed like all feudal lords, from the King downwards—he found justice a profitable business. He "often held in one year four leets or views of frankpledge in Berkeley borough, wherefrom, imposing fourpence and sixpence upon a brewing of ale, and renting out the toll or profit of the wharfage and market there to the lord of the town, he drew yearly from that art more than the rent of the borough." * Again, he dealt in wardships, buying of Edward III. "for 1000 marks . . . the marriage of the heir of John de la Ware, with the profits of his lands, until the full age of the heir." He carried his business habits into every department of life. In founding a chantry at Newport he provided expressly by deed that the priest "should live chastely and honestly, and not come to markets, ale-houses, or taverns, neither should frequent plays or unlawful games; in a word, he made this his priest by these ordinances to be one of those honest men whom we mistakenly call *puritans* in these our days." The accounts of his tournaments are most interesting, and throw a still clearer light on King John's sneer. Smyth notes that this lord was a most enthusiastic jouster, and gives two years as examples from the accounts (1st and 2nd Ed. III.). Yet, in all the six tournaments which Lord Thomas attended in those two years, he spent only £90 18*s.*, or £15 3*s.* per tournament; and this at a time when he was saving money at the rate of £450 a year, an economy which he nearly trebled later on.† He evidently knew, however, that a heavy outlay upon occasion will repay itself with

* These were, of course, fines for breaches of the assize of ale, as in the Norwich cases already mentioned.

† In 1347 his total income was £2460, out of which he saved £1150. In the two other years given by Smyth he saved £659 and £977. Some knights even made a living by pot-hunting at tournaments. See Ch.-V. Langlois, "La Vie en France au M. A.," 1908, p. 163.

interest, for we find him paying £108 for a tower in his castle; and, whereas the park fence had hitherto been of thorn, new-made every three years, Lord Thomas went to the expense of an oaken paling.

Maurice IV. (1361–1368), "in husbandry his father's true apprentice," not only made considerable quantities of wine, cider, and perry from his gardens at Berkeley, but turned an honest penny by selling the apples which had grown under the castle windows. Warned by failing health, he tried to secure the fortune of his eldest son, aged fourteen, by marrying him to the heiress of Lord Lisle. The girl was then only seven, so it was provided that she should live on in her father's house for four years after the wedding. Maurice soon died, and Lord Lisle bought from the King the wardship of his youthful son-in-law for £400 a year—that is, for about a sixth of the whole revenue of the estates. This young Thomas IV., having at last become his own master (1368–1417), "fell into the old course of his father's and grandfather's husbandries." Among other thrifty bargains, he "bought of Henry Talbot twenty-four Scottish prisoners, taken by him upon the land by the seaside, in way of war, as the King's enemies."* He left an only heiress, the broad lands were divided, and the long series of exact stewards' accounts breaks suddenly off. The heir to the peerage, Lord James Berkeley, being involved in perpetual lawsuits, became "a continual borrower, and often of small sums; yea, of church vestments and altar-goods." Not until 1481 did the good husbandry begin again.

It is probable that these Berkeleys were an exceptionally business-like family; but there is similar evidence for other great households, and the intimate history of our noble families is far from justifying that particular view of chivalry which has lately found its most brilliant exponent in William Morris. The custom of modern Florence, where you may ring at a marble

* Cf. a similar instance in Riley, p. 392.

palace and buy from the porter a bottle of the marquis's own wine, is simply a legacy of the Middle Ages.* The English nobles of Chaucer's day were of course far behind their Florentine brethren in this particular direction; but that current was already flowing strongly which, a century later, was to create a new nobility of commerce and wealth in England.

The direct effect of the great French war on chivalry must be reserved for discussion in another chapter; but it is pertinent to point out here one indirect, though very potent, influence. Apart from the business-like way in which towns were pillaged, the custom of ransoming prisoners imported a very definite commercial element into knightly life. In the wars of the 12th and early 13th centuries, when the knights and their mounted retainers formed the backbone of the army on both sides, and were sometimes almost the only combatants, it is astounding to note how few were killed even in decisive battles. At Tinchebrai (1106), which gave Henry I. the whole duchy of Normandy, "the Knights were mostly admitted to quarter; only a few escaped; the rest, 400 in all, were taken prisoners. . . . Not a single knight on Henry's side had been slain." At the "crushing defeat" of Brenville, three years later, "140 knights were captured, but only three slain in the battle." At Bouvines, one of the greatest and most decisive battles of the Middle Ages (1214), even the vanquished lost only 170 knights out of 1500. At Lincoln, in 1217, the victors lost but one knight, and the vanquished apparently only two, though 400 were captured; and even at Lewes (1264) the captives were far more numerous than the slain.† It was, in fact, difficult to kill a fully-armed man except by cutting his throat as he lay on the ground, and from this the victors were generally deterred not only by the freemasonry

* The Shillingford Letters show us the Bishop and Canons of Exeter selling wine in the same way at their own houses (p. 91).

† Oman, "Art of War in the Middle Ages," 380 ff.

which reigned among knights and squires of all nations, but still more by the wicked waste of money involved in such a proceeding. "Many a good prisoner" is a common phrase from Froissart's pen; and, in recounting the battle of Poitiers, he laments that the archers "slew in that affray many men who could not come to ransom or mercy." Though both this and the parallel phrase which he uses at Crécy leave us in doubt which thought was uppermost in his mind, yet he speaks with unequivocal frankness about the slaughter of Aljubarrota: "Lo! behold the great evil adventure that befel that Saturday; for they slew as many prisoners as would well have been worth, one with another, four hundred thousand franks!"* In the days when the great chronicler of chivalry wrote thus, why should not Lord Berkeley deal in Scottish prisoners as his modern descendant might deal in Canadian Pacifics?

It is, indeed, a fatal misapprehension to assume that a society in which coin was necessarily scarce was therefore more indifferent to money than our own age of millionaires and multi-millionaires. The underlying fallacy is scarcely less patent than that which prompted a disappointed mistress to say of her cook, "I *did* think she was honest, for she couldn't even read or write!" Chaucer's contemporaries blamed the prevalent mammon-worship even more loudly and frequently than men do now, with as much sincerity perhaps, and certainly with even more cause. Bribery was rampant in every part of 14th-century society, especially among the highest officials and in the Church. Chaucer's satire on the Archdeacon's itching palm is more than borne out by official documents; and his contemporaries speak even more bitterly of the venality of justice in general. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, in an age when the right of holding courts was notoriously sought mainly for its pecuniary advantages? In "Piers Plowman," Lady Meed (or, in modern slang, the Almighty Dollar)

* Buchon, i., 349, 431; Globe, 349.

rules everywhere, and not least in the law courts. Gower speaks no less plainly. The Judges (he says) are commonly swayed by gifts and personal considerations: "men say, and I believe it, that justice nowadays is in the balance of gold, which hath so great virtue; for, if I give more than thou, thy right is not worth a straw. Right without gifts is of no avail with Judges."* What Gower recorded in the most pointed Latin and French he could muster, the people whose voice he claimed to echo wrote after their own rough fashion in blood. The peasants who rose in 1381 fastened first of all upon what seemed their worst enemies. "Then began they to show forth in deeds part of their inmost purpose, and to behead in revenge all and every lawyer in the land, from the half-fledged pleader to the aged justice, together with all the jurors of the country whom they could catch. For they said that all such must first be slain before the land could enjoy true freedom."†

* "Mirour," 24625. Cf. the corresponding passage in the "Vox Clamantis," Bk. VI. According to Hoccleve, "Law is nye flemëd [= banished] out of this cuntre;" it is a web which catches the small flys and gnats, but lets the great flies go (*Works*, E.E.T.S., iii., 101 ff.).

† Walsingham, an. 1381. The evil repute of jurors is fully explained by Gower, "Mirour," 25033. According to him, perjury had become almost a recognized profession.

CHAPTER XVI

HUSBANDS AT THE CHURCH DOOR

"Io ho uno grandissimo dubbio di voi, ch'io mi credo che se ne salvino tanti pochi di quegli che sono in istato di matrimonio, che de' mille, novecento novantanove credo che sia matrimonio del diavolo."

ST. BERNARDINO OF SIENA, Sermon xix

BUT we have as yet considered only one side of chivalry. While blushing, like Gibbon, to unite such discordant names, let us yet remember that the knight was "the champion of God *and the ladies*," and may therefore fairly claim to be judged in this latter capacity also.

Even here, however, we find him in practice just as far below either his avowed ideal or the too favourable pictures of later romance. The feudal system, with which knighthood was in fact bound up, precluded chivalry to women in its full modern sense. Land was necessarily held by personal service; therefore the woman, useless in war, must necessarily be given with her land to some man able to defend it and her. As even Gautier admits, the woman was too often a mere appendage of the fief; and he quotes from a *chanson de geste*, in which the emperor says to a favoured knight—

> "Un de ces jours mourra un de mes pairs;
> Toute la terre vous en voudrai donner,
> Et la moiller, si prendre la voulez." [femme

Though he is perhaps right in pleading that, as time went on, the compulsion was rather less barefaced than this, he is still compelled sadly to acknowledge of the average medieval match in high life that "after all, whatever may be said, those are not the conditions of

BRASS OF SIR JOHN AND LADY HARSYCK

(From Southacre Church, Norfolk (1384))

(For the lady's cote-hardie and buttons, see p. 27, note 2. Her dress is here embroidered with her own arms and Sir John's.)

a truly free marriage, or, to speak plainly, of a truly Christian one." From this initial defect two others followed almost as a matter of course: the extreme haste with which marriages were concluded, and the indecently early age at which children were bound for life to partners whom they had very likely never seen. Gautier quotes from another *chanson de geste*, where a heroine, within a month of her first husband's death, remarries again on the very day on which her second bridegroom is proposed and introduced to her for the first time; and the poet adds, "Great was the joy and laughter that day!" The extreme promptitude with which the Wife of Bath provided herself with a new husband—or, for the matter of that, Chaucer's own mother—is characteristically medieval.

But child-marriages were the real curse of medieval home-life in high society. The immaturity of the parents could not fail to tell often upon the children; and when Berthold of Regensburg pointed out how brief was the average of life among the 13th-century nobility, and ascribed this to God's vengeance for their heartlessness towards the poor, he might more truly have traced the cause much further back. "In days of old," wrote a *trouvère* of the 12th century, "nobles married at a mature age; faith and loyalty then reigned everywhere. But nowadays avarice and luxury are rampant, and two infants of twelve years old are wedded together: take heed lest they breed children!" * The Church did, indeed, refuse to recognize the bond of marriage if contracted before both parties had turned seven; and she further forbade the making of such contracts until the age of twelve for the girl and fifteen for the boy, though without daring, in this case, to impugn the validity of the marriage once contracted. That the weaker should be allowed to marry three years earlier than the stronger sex is justified by at least one great canon lawyer on the principle that

* Gautier, *loc. cit.*, p. 352.

"ill weeds grow apace"; a decision on which one would gladly have heard the comments of the Wife of Bath.* But "people let the Church protest, and married at any age they pleased"; for it was seldom indeed that the ecclesiastical prohibition was enforced against influence or wealth, and the Church herself, theory apart, was directly responsible for many of the worst abuses in this matter. Her determination to keep the whole marriage-law in her own hands, combined with her readiness to sell dispensations from her own regulations, resulted in a state of things almost incredible. On the one hand, a marriage was nullified by cousinship to the fourth degree, and even by the fact of the contracting parties having ever stood as sponsors to the same child, unless a papal dispensation had been bought; and this absurd severity not only nullified in theory half the peasants' marriages (since nearly everybody is more or less related in a small village), but gave rise to all sorts of tricks for obtaining fraudulent divorces. To quote again from Gautier, who tries all through to put the best possible face on the matter: "After a few years of marriage, a husband who had wearied of his wife could suddenly discover that they were related . . . and here was a revival, under canonical and pious forms, of the ancient practice of divorce." It is the greatest mistake to suppose that divorce was a difficult matter in the Middle Ages; it was simply a question of money, as honest men frequently complained. The Church courts were ready to "make and unmake matrimony for money"; and "for a mantle of miniver" a man might get rid of his lawful wife.† An actual instance is worth many generalities. In the first quarter of the 14th century a Pope allowed the King and Queen of France to separate because they had *once* been godparents to the same child; and at the same time sold a dispensation to a rich citizen who had *twice*

* Lyndwood, "Provinciale," ed. Oxon., p. 272.

† "Piers Plowman," B., xv., 237, and xx., 137.

contracted the same relationship to the lady whom he now wished to marry. The collocation, in this case, was piquant enough to beget a clever pasquinade, which was chalked up at street corners in Paris. John XXII. probably laughed with the rest, and went on as before.

On the one hand, then, the marriage law was theoretically of the utmost strictness, though only to the poor man; but, on the other hand, it was of the most incredible laxity. A boy of fifteen and a girl of twelve might, at any time and in any place, not only without leave of parents, but against all their wishes, contract an indissoluble marriage by mere verbal promise, without any priestly intervention whatever. In other words, the whole world in Chaucer's time was a vaster and more commodious Gretna Green.* Moreover, not only the civil power, but apparently even the Church, sometimes hesitated to enforce even such legal precautions as existed against scandalous child-marriages. A stock case is quoted at length in the contemporary "Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln" (R.S., pp. 170–177), and fully corroborated by official documents. A wretched child who had just turned four was believed to be an heiress; a great noble took her to wife. He died two years later; she was at once snapped up by a second noble; and on his death, when she was apparently still only eleven, and certainly not much older, she was bought for 300 marks by a third knightly bridegroom. The bishop, though he excommunicated the first husband, and deprived the priest who had openly married him "in the face of the church," apparently made no attempt to declare the marriage null; and the third husband was still enjoying her estate twenty years after his wedding-

* Pollock and Maitland, "History of English Law," vol. i., p. 387; Lyndwood, "Provinciale," pp. 271 ff. It is the more necessary to insist on this, because of a serious error, based on a misreading of Bishop Quivil's injunctions. The bishop does, indeed, proclaim his right and duty of *punishing* the parties to a clandestine marriage; but, so far from flying in the face of Canon Law by threatening to *dissolve* the contract, he expressly admits, in the same breath, its binding force.—Wilkins, ii., 135.

day. In the face of instances like this (for another, scarcely less startling, may be found in Luce's "Du Guesclin," p. 139), we need no longer wonder that our poet's father was carried off in his earliest teens to be married by force to some girl perhaps even younger; or that in Chaucer's own time, when the middle classes were rapidly gaining more power in the state, Parliament legislated expressly against the frequent offences of this kind.

But the real root of the evil remained; so long as two children might, in a moment and without any religious ceremony whatever, pledge their persons and their properties for life, no legislation could be permanently effectual. From the moral side, we find Church councils fulminating desperately against the celebration of marriages in private houses or taverns, sometimes even after midnight, and with the natural concomitants of riot and excess. From the purely civil side, again, apart from runaway or irregular matches, there was also the scandalous frequency of formal child-marriages which were often the only security for the transmission of property; and here even the Church admitted the thin end of the wedge by permitting espousals "of children in their cradles," by way of exception, "for the sake of peace."* Let me quote here again from Smyth's "Lives of the Berkeleys." We there find, between 1288 and 1500, five marriages in which the ten contracting parties averaged less than eleven years. Maurice the Third, born in 1281, was only eight years old when he married a wife apparently of the same age; their eldest child was born before the father was fifteen; and the loyal Smyth comforts himself by reciting from Holy Scripture the still more precocious examples of Josiah and Solomon. It would be idle to multiply instances of so notorious a fact; but let us take one more case which touched all England, and must have come directly under Chaucer's notice. When the good

* Wilkins, "Concilia," i., 478.

Queen Anne of Bohemia was dead, for whose sake Richard II. would never afterwards live in his palace of Shene, it was yet necessary for his policy to take another wife. He chose the little daughter of the French King, then only seven years old, in spite of the remonstrances of his subjects. The pair were affianced by proxy in 1395; "and then (as I have been told) it was pretty to see her, young as she was; for she very well knew already how to play the queen." Next year, the two Kings met personally between Guines and Ardres, the later "Field of the Cloth of Gold," and sat down to meat together. "Then said the Duc de Bourbon many joyous and merry words to make the kings laugh. . . . And he spake aloud, addressing himself to the King of England, 'My Lord King of England, you should make good cheer; you have all that you desire and ask; you have your wife, or shall have; she shall be delivered to you!' Then said the King of France, 'Cousin of Bourbon, we would that our daughter were as old as our cousin the lady de St. Pol. She would bear the more love to our son the King of England, and it would have cost us a heavy dowry.' The King of England heard and understood this speech; wherefore he answered, inclining himself towards the King of France (though, indeed, the word had been addressed to the Duke, since the King had made the comparison of the daughter of the Comte de St. Pol), 'Fair father, we are well pleased with the present age of our wife, and we love not so much that she should be of great age as we take account of the love and alliance of our own selves and our kingdoms; for when we shall be at one accord and alliance together, there is no king in Christendom or elsewhere who could gainsay us.'"* The Royal pair proceeded at once to Calais, and the formal wedding took place three days later in the old church of St. Nicholas, which to Ruskin was a perpetual type of "the links unbroken between the past and present."

* Froissart, Buchon, iii., 235, 258.

What kings were obliged to do at one time for political purposes, they would do at other times for money; and their subjects followed suit. As one of the authors of "Piers Plowman" puts it, the marriage choice should depend on personal qualities, and Christ will then bless it with sufficient prosperity.

"But few folk now follow this; for they give their children
For covetise of chattels and cunning chapmen;
Of kin nor of kindred account men but little . . .
Let her be unlovely, unlovesome abed,
A bastard, a bondmaid, a beggar's daughter,
That no courtesy can; but let her be known
For rich or well-rented, though she be wrinkled for elde,
There is no squire nor knight in country about,
But will bow to that bondmaid, to bid her an husband,
And wedden her for her wealth; and wish on the morrow
That his wife were wax, or a wallet-full of nobles!" *

Moreover, this picture is abundantly borne out by plain facts and plain speech from other quarters. Richard II.'s first marriage, which turned out so happily when the boy of sixteen and the girl of fifteen had grown to know each other, was, in its essence, a bargain of pounds, shillings, and pence. A contemporary chronicler, recording how Richard offered an immense sum for her in order to outbid his Royal brother of France, heads his whole account of the transaction with the plain words, "The king buys himself a wife." † Gaston, Count of Foix, whom Froissart celebrates as a mirror of courtesy among contemporary princes, had a little ward of twelve whose hand was coveted by the great Duc de Berri, verging on his fiftieth year. But Gaston came most unwillingly

* "Piers Plowman," C., xi., 256. Gower speaks still more strongly if possible, "Mirour," 17245 ff. Chaucer's friend Hoccleve makes the same complaint (E.E.T.S., vol. iii., p. 60), and these practices outlasted the Reformation. The curious reader should consult Dr. Furnivall's "Child Marriages and Divorces" (E.E.T.S., 1897).

† "Adam of Usk," p. 3; cf. "Eulog. Hist.," iii., 355 (where the price is given as 22,000 marks), and 237, where the negotiations for another Royal marriage are described with equally brutal frankness.

to the point: "Yet was he not unwilling to suffer that the marriage should take place, but he intended to have a good sum of florins; not that he put forward that he meant to sell the lady, but he wished to be rewarded for his wardship, since he had had and nourished her for some nine years and a half, wherefore he required thirty thousand francs for her."* Dr. Gairdner has cited equally plain language used in the following century by a member of the noble family of Scrope, whose estate had become much impoverished. "'For very need,' he writes, 'I was fain to sell a little daughter I have for much less than I should have done by possibility'—a considerable point in his complaint being evidently the lowness of the price he got for his own child." Down to the very lowest rung of the social ladder, marriage was to a great extent a matter of money; and if we could look into the manor-rolls of Chaucer's perfect gentle Knight, we should find that one source of his income was a tax on each poor serf for leave to take a fellow-bondmaid to his bosom.† If, on the other hand, the pair dispensed with any marriage ceremony, then they must pay a heavy fine to the archdeacon. Yet, even so, marriage was not business-like enough for some satirists. Chaucer's fellow-poet, Eustache Deschamps, echoes the complaint, already voiced in the "Roman de la Rose," that one never buys a horse or other beast without full knowledge of all its points, whereas one takes a wife like a pig in a poke.‡ The complaint has, of course, been made before and since; but Bishop Stapledon's

Froissart, Buchon, ii., 758.

† "Paston Letters," 1901, Introd., p. clxxvi.; cf. for example, Thorold Rogers' "Hist. of Ag. and Prices," ii., 608. "Megge, the daughter of John, son of Utting," pays only 1*s.* for her marriage; but "Alice's daughter" pays 6*s.* 8*d.*; and so on to "Will, the son of John," and "Roger the Reeve," who pay each 20*s.*, or something like £20 in modern value. The merchet was directly chargeable to the father; but the bridegroom must often have had to pay it.

‡ Sarradin, "Deschamps," p. 256.

register may testify that it was seldom less justified than in Chaucer's time.

Such was one side of marriage in the days of chivalry. A woman could inherit property, but seldom defend it. The situation was too tempting to man's cupidity; and no less temptation was offered by the equally helpless class of orphans. A wardship, which in our days is generally an honourable and thankless burden, was in Chaucer's time a lucrative and coveted windfall. In London the city customs granted a guardian, for his trouble, ten per cent. of the ward's property every year.* This was an open bargain which, in the hands of an honourable citizen, restored to the ward his patrimony with increase, but gave the guardian enough profit to make such wardships a coveted privilege even among well-to-do citizens. Elsewhere, where the customs were probably less precisely marked—and certainly the legal checks were fewer—wardships were treated even more definitely as profitable windfalls. We have seen how the Baron of Berkeley paid £10,000 in modern money for a single ward; Chaucer, as we know from a contemporary document, made some £1500 out of his, and Gaston de Foix a proportionately greater sum. Moreover, even great persons did not blush to buy and sell wardships, from the King downwards. The above-quoted Stephen Scrope, who sold his own daughter as a matter of course, is indignant with his guardian, Sir John Fastolf, who had sold him to the virtuous Chief Justice Gascoigne for 500 marks,

* Riley, p. 379. It must, however, be remembered that the ordinary rate of interest then was twenty per cent. Thus Robert de Brynkeleye receives the wardship of Thomas atte Boure, who had a patrimony of £300 (14th-century standard). With this Robert trades, paying his twenty per cent. for the use of it, so that he has to account for £1080 at the heir's majority. Of this he takes £120 for keep and out-of-pocket expenses, and £390 for his trouble, so that the ward receives £570. The Royal Household Ordinances of Edward II.'s reign provide for the maintenance of wards until "they have their lands, or the king have given *or sold* them."—"Life Records," ii., p. 19.

"through which sale I took a sickness that kept me a thirteen or fourteen years ensuing; whereby I am disfigured in my person, and shall be whilst I live." Gascoigne had purchased Scrope for one of his own daughters. Fastolf bought him back again to avoid such a *mésalliance;* but the costs of each transfer, and something more, came out of the hapless ward's estate. "He bought and sold me as a beast, against all right and law, to mine own hurt more than a thousand marks." Moreover, the means that were taken to avoid such disastrous wardships became themselves one of the most active of the many forces which undermined the strict code of chivalry. A knight, in theory, was capable of looking after himself; therefore careful and influential parents like the Berkeleys sought to protect their heirs by knighthood from falling into wardships as minors, in defiance of the rule which placed the earliest limit at twenty-one. Thus Maurice de Berkeley (IV.) was knighted in 1339 at the age of seven, and one of his descendants in 1476 at the age of five; and Eustache Deschamps complains of the practice as one of the open sores of contemporary chivalry—

"Et encore plus me confond,
Ce que Chevaliers se font
Plusieurs trop petitement,
Qui dix ou qui sept ans n'ont."*

The practice shows equally clearly how hollow the dignity was becoming, and how little an unprotected child could count upon chivalric consideration, in the proper sense of the word.

Nor can these bargains in women and orphans be treated as a mere accident; they formed an integral part of medieval life, and influenced deeply all social

* Ste-Palaye, *loc. cit.*, i., 64 ff.; ii., 90. This rule of age, like all others, had, however, been broken from the first. As early as 1060, Geoffrey of Anjou knighted his nephew Fulk at the age of 17; and such incidents are common in epics. Princes of the blood were knighted in their cradles.

relations. The men who bought their wives like chattels were only too likely to treat them accordingly. Take from the 14th and early 15th centuries two well-known instances, which would be utterly inconceivable in this unchivalrous age of ours. Edward I. hung up the Countess of Buchan in a wooden cage on the walls of Berwick "that passers-by might gaze on her"; and when a woman accused a Franciscan friar of treasonable speeches, the King's justiciar decided that the two should proceed to wager of battle, the friar having one hand tied behind his back. At the best, the knight's oath provided no greater safeguard for women than the unsworn but inbred courtesy of a modern gentleman. When the peasant rebels of 1381 broke into the Tower, and some miscreants invited the Queen Mother to kiss them, "yet (strange to relate) the many knights and squires dared not rebuke one of the rioters for acts so indecent, or lay hold of them to stop them, or even murmur under their breath." *

But the strangest fact to modern minds is the prevalence of wife-beating, sister-beating, daughter-beating. The full evidence would fill a volume; but no picture of medieval life can be even approximately complete without more quotations than are commonly given on this subject. In the great epics, when the hero loses his temper, the ladies of his house too often suffer in face or limb. Gautier, in a chapter already referred to, quotes a large number of instances; but the words of contemporary law-givers and moralists are even more significant. The theory was based, of course, on Biblical texts; if God had meant woman for a position of superiority, he would have taken her from Adam's head rather than from his side.† Her inferiority is thus proclaimed almost on the first page of Holy Scripture; and inferiority, in an age of violence,

* Walsingham, ann. 1307, 1381; "Eulog. Hist.," iii., 189, 389. The woman avoided the battle only by withdrawing her accusation.

† Gower, "Mirour," 17521.

necessarily involves subjection to corporal punishment. Gautier admits that it was already a real forward step when the 13th-century "Coutumes du Beauvoisis" enacted that a man must beat his wife "only in reason." A very interesting theological dictionary of early 14th century date, preserved in the British Museum (6 E. VI. 214A), expresses the ordinary views of cultured ecclesiastics. "Moreover a man may chastise his wife and beat her by way of correction, for she forms part of his household; so that he, the master, may chastise that which is his, as it is written in the Gloss [to Canon Law]." Not long after Chaucer's death, St. Bernardino of Siena grants the same permission, even while rebuking the immoderate abuse of marital authority. "There are men who can bear more patiently with a hen that lays a fresh egg every day, than with their own wives; and sometimes when the hen breaks a pipkin or a cup he will spare it a beating, simply for love of the fresh egg which he is unwilling to lose. O raving madmen! who cannot bear a word from their own wives, though they bear them such fair fruit; but when the woman speaks a word more than they like, then they catch up a stick and begin to cudgel her; while the hen, that cackles all day and gives you no rest, you take patience with her for the sake of her miserable egg—and sometimes she will break more in your house than she herself is worth, yet you bear it in patience for the egg's sake! Many fidgetty fellows who sometimes see their wives turn out less neat and dainty than they would like, smite them forthwith; and meanwhile the hen may make a mess on the table, and you suffer her. . . . Don't you see the pig too, always squeaking and squealing and making your house filthy; yet you suffer him until the time for slaughtering, and your patience is only for the sake of his flesh to eat! Consider, rascal, consider the noble fruit of thy wife, and have patience; it is not right to beat her for every cause, no!" In another sermon, speaking

of the extravagant and sometimes immodest fashions of the day, he says to the over-dressed woman in his congregation, "Oh, if it were my business, if I were your husband, I would give you such a drubbing with feet and fists, that I would make you remember for a while!"* Lastly, let us take the manual which Chaucer's contemporary, the Knight of La Tour Landry, wrote for the education of his daughters, and which became at once one of the most popular books of the Middle Ages.† The good knight relates quite naturally several cases of assault and battery, of which the first may suffice. A man had a scolding wife, who railed ungovernably upon him before strangers. "And he, that was angry of her governance, smote her with his fist down to the earth; and then with his foot he struck her in the visage and brake her nose, and all her life after she had her nose crooked, the which shent and disfigured her visage after, that she might not for shame show her visage, it was so foul blemished: [for the nose is the fairest member that man or woman hath, and sitteth in the middle of the visage]. And this she had for her evil and great language that she was wont to say to her husband. And therefore the wife ought to suffer and let the husband have the words, and to be master. . . ."

What was sauce for women was, of course, sauce for children also. Uppingham is far from being the only English school which has for its seal a picture of the pedagogue dominating with his enormous birch over a group of tiny urchins. At the Universities, when a student took a degree in grammar, he "received as a symbol of his office, not a book like Masters of the other Faculties, but two to him far more important

* "Prediche Volgari," ii., 115, and iii., 176.

† I quote from the 15th-century English translation published by the E.E.T.S. (pp. 25, 27, 81; cf. 23, 95; the square bracket is transferred from p. 23). Between 1484 and 1538 there were at least eight editions printed in French, English, and German.

academical instruments—a 'palmer' and a birch, and thereupon entered upon the discharge of the most fundamental and characteristic part of his official duties by flogging a boy 'openlye in the Scolys.' Having paid a groat to the Bedel for the birch, and a similar sum to the boy 'for hys labour,' the Inceptor became a fully accredited Master in Grammar."* At home, girls and boys were beaten indiscriminately. One of the earliest books of household conduct, "How the Good Wife taught her Daughter," puts the matter in a nutshell—

" And if thy children be rebèl, and will not them low,
If any of them misdoeth, neither ban them nor blow [curse nor cuff
But take a smart rod, and beat them on a row
Till they cry mercy, and be of their guilt aknow." [acknowledge

* Rashdall, "Universities of Europe," ii., 599.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GAY SCIENCE

"Madamë, whilom I was one
That to my father had a king;
But I was slow, and for nothing
Me listë not to Love obey;
And that I now full sore abey. . . .
Among the gentle nation
Love is an occupation
Which, for to keep his lustës save,
Should every gentle heartë have."
GOWER, "Confessio Amantis," Bk. IV

THE facts given in the foregoing chapter may explain a good deal in the Wife of Bath's Prologue that might otherwise be ascribed to wide poetical licence; but they may seem strangely at variance with the "Knight's Tale" or the "Book of the Duchess." The contradiction, however, lies only on the surface. Neither flesh nor spirit can suffer extreme starvation. When the facts of life are particularly sordid, then that "large and liberal discontent," which is more or less rooted in every human breast, builds itself an ideal world out of those very materials which are most conspicuously and most painfully lacking in the ungrateful reality. The conventional platonism and self-sacrifice of love, according to the knightly theory, was in strict proportion to its rarity in knightly practice. We must, of course, beware of the facile assumption that these medieval *mariages de convenance* were so much less happy than ours; nothing in human nature is more marvellous than its adaptability; and Richard II., for instance, seems to have bought himself with hard

cash as great a treasure as that which Tennyson's Lord of Burleigh won with more subtle discrimination. But at least the conditions of actual marriage were generally far less romantic then than now; and, at a time when the supposed formal judgment of a Court of Love, "that no married pair can really be in love with each other," was accepted even as *ben trovato*, it was natural that highly imaginative pictures of love *par amours* should be extremely popular.

Let us consider again for a moment the conditions of life in a medieval castle. In spite of a good deal of ceremonial which has long gone out of fashion, the actual daily intercourse between man and woman was closer there than at present, in proportion as artificial distances were greater. The lady might stand as high above the squire as the heaven is in comparison with the earth; but she had scarcely more privacy than on board a modern ship. They were constantly in each other's sight, yet could never by any possibility exchange a couple of confidential sentences except by a secret and dangerous rendezvous in some private room, or by such stray chances as some meeting on the stairs, some accident which dispersed the hunting-party and left them alone in the forest, or similar incidents consecrated to romance. The three great excitements of man's life—war, physical exercise, and carousing—touched the ladies far less nearly, and left them ordinarily to a life which their modern sisters would condemn as hopelessly dull. The daily-suppressed craving for excitement, the nervous irritability generated by artificial constraint, explain many contrasts which are conspicuous in medieval manners. Moreover, there were men always at hand, and always on the watch to seize the smallest chance. The Knight of La Tour Landry is not the only medieval writer who describes his own society in very much the same downright words as the Prophet Jeremiah (ch. v., v. 8). The very *raison d'être* of his book was the recollection how, in younger days, "my

fellows communed with ladies and gentlewomen, the which [fellows] prayed them of love; for there was none of them that they might find, lady or gentlewoman, but they would pray her; and if that one would not intend to that, other would anon pray. And whether they had good answer or evil, they recked never, for they had in them no shame nor dread by the cause that they were so used. And thereto they had fair language and words; for in every place they would have had their sports and their might. And so they did both deceive ladies and gentlewomen, and bear forth divers languages on them, some true and some false, of the which there came to divers great defames and slanders without cause and reason. . . . And I asked them why they foreswore them, saying that they loved every woman best that they spake to: for I said unto them, 'Sirs, ye should love nor be about to have but one.' But what I said unto them, it was never the better. And therefore because I saw at that time the governance of them, the which I doubted that time yet reigneth, and there be such fellows now or worse, and therefore I purposed to make a little book . . . to the intent that my daughters should take ensample of fair continuance and good manners." The tenor of the whole book more than bears out the promise of this introduction: and the good knight significantly recommends his daughters to fast thrice a week as a sovereign specific against such dangers (pp. 2, 10, 14).

We have seen how often women were forbidden attendance at all sorts of public dances, and even weddings; and how demurely they were bidden to pace the streets. The accompanying illustration from a 15th-century miniature given by Thomas Wright ("Womankind in Western Europe," p. 157) shows on the one hand the formal way in which girls were expected to cross their hands on their laps as they sat, and on the other hand the licence which naturally followed by reaction from so much formality. Both

sides come out fully in the Knight's book. We see a girl losing a husband through a freedom of speech with her prospective fiancé which seems to us most natural and innocent; while the coarsest words and actions were permitted to patterns of chivalry in the presence of ladies. A stifling conventionality oppressed the model young lady, while the less wise virgin rushed into the other extreme of "rere-suppers" after bedtime with like-minded companions of both sexes, and other liberties more startling

WISE AND UNWISE VIRGINS

still.* In every generation moralists noted with pain the gradual emancipation of ladies from a restraint which had always been excessive, and had often been merely theoretical, though those who regretted this most bitterly in their own time believed also most implicitly in the strict virtues of a golden past. Guibert of Nogent contrasts the charming picture of his own chaste mother with what he sees (or thinks he sees) around him in St. Bernard's days. "Lord, thou knowest

* Pp. 8, 18, 33, 36, 156, 207, 217, 218, and *passim.*

how hardly—nay, almost how impossibly—that virtue [of chastity] is kept by women of our time: whereas of old there was such modesty that scarce any marriage was branded even by common gossip! Alas, how miserably, between those days and ours, maidenly modesty and honour have fallen off, and the mother's guardianship has decayed both in appearance and in fact; so that in all their behaviour nothing can be noted but unseemly mirth, wherein are no sounds but of jest, with winking eyes and babbling tongues, and wanton gait. . . . Each thinks that she has touched the lowest step of misery if she lack the regard of lovers; and she measures her glory of nobility and courtliness by the ampler numbers of such suitors." Men were more modest of old than women are now: the present man can talk of nothing but his *bonnes fortunes.* "By these modern fashions, and others like them, this age of ours is corrupted and spreads further corruption." In short, it is the familiar philippic of well-meaning orators in every age against the sins of society, and the familiar regret of the good old times. The Knight of La Tour Landry, again, would place the age of real modesty about the time of his own and Chaucer's father, a date by which, according to Guibert's calculations, the growing shamelessness of the world ought long ago to have worn God's patience threadbare.

Each was of course so far right that he lived (as we all do) in a time of transition, and that he saw, as we too see, much that might certainly be changed for the better. These things were even more glaring in the Middle Ages than now. We must not look for too much refinement of outward manners at this early date; but even in essential morality the girl-heroines of medieval romance must be placed, on the whole, even below those of the average French novel.* In both cases we must,

* "Most of the girls in our 'Chansons de Geste' are represented by our poets as horrible little monsters, . . . shameless, worse than impudent, caring little whether the whole world watches them, and obeying at all

of course, make the same allowance; it would be equally unfair to judge Chaucer's contemporaries and modern Parisian society strictly according to the novelist's or the poet's pictures. But in either case the popularity of the type points to a real underlying truth; and we should err less in taking the early romances literally than in accepting Ivanhoe, for instance, as a typical picture of medieval love. No one poet represents that love so fully as Chaucer, in both its aspects. I say in *both*, and not in *all*, for such love as lent itself to picturesque treatment had then practically only two aspects, the most ideal and the most material. The maiden whose purity of heart and freedom of manners are equally natural was not only non-existent at that stage of society, but inconceivable. Emelye is, within her limits, as beautiful and touching a figure as any in poetry; but her limits are those of a figure in a stained-glass window compared with a portrait of Titian's. Chaucer himself could not have made her a Die Vernon or an Ethel Newcome; with fuller modelling and more freedom of action in the story, she could at best have become a sort of Beatrix Esmond. But of heavenly love and earthly love, as they were understood in his time, our poet gives us ample choice. It has long ago been noted how large a proportion of his whole work turns on this one passion.* As he said of himself, he had "told of lovers up and down more than Ovid maketh of mention": he was "Love's clerk." His earthly love we may here neglect, only remembering that it is never merely wicked, but always relieved by wit and humour—indeed, by wit and humour of his very best. But his

hazards the mere brutality of their instincts. Their forwardness is not only beyond all conception, but contrary to all probability and all sincere observation of human nature." Gautier, *l.c.*, p. 378.

* There is a very interesting essay on "Chaucer's Love Poetry" in the *Cornhill*, vol. xxxv., p. 280. It is, however, a good deal spoiled by the author's inclusion of many works once attributed to the poet, but now known to be spurious.

heavenly love, the ideal service of chivalry, deserves looking into more closely; the more so as his notions are so exactly those of his time, except so far as they are chastened by his rare sense of humour.

Amor, che al gentil cuor ratto s'apprende—so sings Francesca in Dante's "Inferno." Love is to every "gentle" heart—to any one who has not a mere money-bag or clod of clay in his breast—not only an unavoidable fate but a paramount duty. As Chaucer's Arcite says, "A man must needës love, maugre his head; he may not flee it, though he should be dead." Troilus, again, who had come to years of discretion, and earned great distinction in war without ever having felt the tender passion, is so far justly treated as a heathen and a publican even by the frivolous Pandarus, who welcomes his conversion as unctuously as Mr. Stiggins might have accepted Mr. Weller's—

> Love, of his goodness,
> Hath thee converted out of wickedness.

But perhaps the best instance is that afforded by the famous medieval romance of "Petit Jean de Saintré" (chaps. i.–iv.). Jean, at the age of thirteen, became page to the chivalrous King John of France; as nearly as possible at the same time as Chaucer was serving the Duchess of Clarence in the same capacity. One of the ladies-in-waiting at the same Court was a young widow, who for her own amusement brought Petit Jean formally into her room. "Madame, seated at the foot of the little bed, made him stand between her and her women, and then laid it on his faith to tell her the truth of whatsoever she should ask. The poor boy, who little guessed her drift, gave the promise, thinking 'Alas, what have I done? what can this mean?' And while he thus wondered, Madame said, smiling upon her women, 'Tell me, master, upon the faith which you have pledged me; tell me first of all how long it is since you saw your lady *par amours?*' So when he heard speech

of *lady par amours*, as one who had never thought thereon, the tears came to his eyes, and his heart beat and his face grew pale, for he knew not how to speak a single word. . . . And they pressed him so hard that he said, 'Madam, I have none.' 'What, you have none!' said the lady: 'ha! how happy would she be who had such a lover! It may well be that you have none, and well I believe it; but tell me, how long is it since you saw her whom you most love, and would fain have for your lady?'" The poor boy could say nothing, but knelt there twisting the end of his belt between his fingers until the waiting-women pitied him and advised him to answer the lady's question. "'Tell without more ado' (said they), 'whom you love best.' 'Whom I love best?' (said he), 'that is my lady mother, and then my sister Jacqueline.' Then said the lady, 'Sir boy, I intend not of your mother or sister, for the love of mother and sister and kinsfolk is utterly different from that of lady *par amours;* but I ask you of such ladies as are none of your kin.' 'Of them?' (said he), 'by my faith, lady, I love none.' Then said the lady, 'What! you love none? Ha! craven gentleman, you say that you love none? Thereby know I well that you will never be worth a straw. . . . Whence came the great valiance and exploits of Lancelot, Gawayne, Tristram, Biron the Courteous, and other Champions of the Round Table? . . .' The sermon was unmercifully long, and it left the culprit in helpless tears; at the women's intercession, he was granted another day's respite. Boylike, he succeeded in shirking day after day until he hoped he was forgotten. But the inexorable lady caught him soon after, and tormented him until "as he thought within himself whom he should name, then (as nature desires and attracts like to like), he bethought himself of a little maiden of the court who was ten years of age. Then he said, 'Lady, it is Matheline de Coucy.' And when the lady heard this name, she thought well that this was but childish fondness and

ignorance; yet she made more ado than before, and said, 'Now I see well that you are a most craven squire to have chosen Matheline for your service; not but that she is a most comely maiden, and of good house and better lineage than your own; but what good, what profit, what honour, what gain, what advantage, what comfort, what help, and what counsel can come therefrom to your own person, to make you a valiant man? What are the advantages which you can draw from Matheline, who is yet but a child? Sir, you should choose a Lady who . . .'" In short, the lady whom she finally commends to his notice is her own self. Little by little she teaches the stripling all that she knows of love; and later on, when she is cloyed with possession and weary of his absence at the wars, much that he had never guessed before of falsehood. The story is an admirable commentary on the well-known lines in Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," where the Black Knight says of himself—

> . . . since first I couth
> Have any manner wit from youth
> Or kindëly understanding [natural
> To comprehend in any thing
> What love was in mine ownë wit,
> Dreadëless I have ever yet [certainly
> Been tributary and given rent
> To love, wholly with good intent,
> And through pleasaunce become his thrall
> With good will—body, heart, and all.
> All this I put in his servage
> As to my lord, and did homage,
> And full devoutly prayed him-to,
> He should beset mine heartë so
> That it plesaunce to him were,
> And worship to my lady dear.
> And this was long, and many a year
> Ere that mine heart was set aught-where,
> That I did thus, and knew not why;
> I trow, it came me kindëly.

If death comes at this moment, then "J'aurai passé par la terre, n'ayant rien aimé que l'amour." But instead

of death comes something not less sudden and overmastering. To the Black Knight, as to Dante, the Lady of his Life is revealed between two throbs of the heart—

> It happed that I came on a day
> Into a placë where I say [saw
> Truly the fairest company
> Of ladies, that ever man with eye
> Had seen together in one place . . .
> Sooth to sayen, I saw one
> That was like none of the rout . . .
> I saw her dance so comelily,
> Carol and sing so sweetëly,
> Laugh and play so womanly,
> And look so debonairëly,
> So goodly speak, and so friendly,
> That certes, I trow that nevermore
> Was seen so blissful a tresore.

Here at last the goddess of his hopes is revealed in the flesh; no longer the vague *Not Impossible She*, but henceforward *She of the Golden Hair*. The revelation commands the gratitude of a lifetime. Having crystallized upon herself his fluid and floating worship, she is henceforth conventionally divine; he demands no more than to be allowed to gaze on her, and in gazing he swoons.

As yet, then, she is his idol, his goddess, on an unapproachable pedestal. She may be pretty patently the work of his own hands—he has gone about dreaming of love until his dreams have taken sufficient consistency to be visible and tangible—but as yet his worship must be as far-off as Pygmalion's, and he thirsts in vain for a word or a look. Then comes the second clause of Francesca's creed—*Amor, che a nullo amato amar perdona:* true love must needs beget love in return. The statue warms to life; the goddess steps down from her pedestal; the lover forgets now that he had meant to subsist for life on half a dozen kind looks and kind words; and at this point the matter would end nowadays—or at least would have ended a generation

ago—in mere prosaic marriage. But here, in the Middle Ages, it is fifty to one that the fortunes of the pair are not exactly suitable; or he, or she, or both may be married already. Then comes the final clause: *Amor condusse noi ad una morte.* Seldom indeed could the course of true love run smooth in an age of business-marriages; and the poet found his grandest material in the wreckage of tender passions and high hopes upon that iron-bound shore.

The large majority of medieval romances, as has long ago been noted, celebrate illicit love. Therefore the first commandment of the code is secrecy, absolute secrecy; and in the songs of the Troubadors and Minnesingers, a personage almost as prominent as the two lovers themselves, is the "envious," the "spier"—the person from whom it is impossible to escape for more than a minute at a time, amid the cheek-by-jowl of castle intercourse—a disappointed rival perhaps, or a mere malicious busybody, but, in any case, a perpetual skeleton at the feast. "Troilus and Criseyde," for instance, is full of such allusions, and perhaps no poem exemplifies more clearly the common divorce between romantic love and marriage in medieval literature. It is a comparatively small thing that the first three books of the poem should contain no hint of matrimony, though Criseyde is a widow, and of noble blood. It would, after all, have been less of a *mésalliance* than John of Gaunt's marriage; but of course it was perfectly natural for Chaucer to take the line of least poetical resistance, and make Troilus enjoy her love in secret, without thought of consecration by the rites of the Church. So far, the poem runs parallel with Goethe's "Faust." But when we come to the last two books, the behaviour of the pair is absolutely inexplicable to any one who has not realized the usual conventions of medieval romance. The Trojan prince Antenor is taken prisoner by the Greeks, who offer to exchange him against Criseyde — a fighting man against a mere

woman. Hector does indeed protest in open Parliament—

> But on my part ye may eft-soon them tell
> We usen here no women for to sell.

But the political utility of the exchange is so obvious that Parliament determines to send the unwilling Criseyde away. What, it may be asked, is Troilus doing all this time? As Priam's son, he would have had a voice in the council second only to Hector's, and he "well-nigh died" to hear the proposition. Yet all through this critical discussion he kept silence, "lest men should his affection espy!" The separation, he knows, will kill him; but among all the measures he debates with Criseyde or Pandarus—even among the desperate acts which he threatens to commit—nothing so desperate as plain marriage seems to occur to any of the three. The first thought of Troilus is "how to save her honour," but only in the technical sense of medieval chivalry, by feigning indifference to her. He sheds floods of tears; he tells Fortune that if only he may keep his lady, he is reckless of all else in the world; but, when for a moment he thinks of begging Criseyde's freedom from the King his father, it is only to thrust the thought aside at once. The step would be not only useless, but necessarily involve "slander to her name." * And all this was written for readers who knew very well that the parties had only to swear, first that they had plighted troth before witnesses, and secondly, that they had lived together as man and wife, in order to prove an indissoluble marriage contract. Nor can we ascribe this to any failure in Chaucer's art. In the delineation of feelings, their natural development and their finer shades, he is second to no medieval poet, and these qualities come out especially in the "Troilus." But, while he boldly changed so much in Boccaccio's conception of the poem, he saw no reason to change

* Bk. IV., ll. 152, 158, 367, 519, 554, 564.

this particular point, for it was thoroughly in accord with those conventions of his time for which he kept some respect even through his frequent irony.

To show clearly how the fault here is not in the poet but in the false *point d'honneur* of the chivalric love-code, let us compare it with a romance in real life from the "Paston Letters." Sir John Paston's steward, Richard Calle, fell in love with his master's sister Margery. The Pastons, who not only were great gentlefolk in a small way, but were struggling hard also to become great gentlefolk in a big way, took up the natural position that "he should never have my good will for to make my sister sell candle and mustard in Framlingham." But the pair had already plighted their mutual troth; and, therefore, though not yet absolutely married, they were so far engaged that neither could marry any one else without a Papal dispensation. Calle urged Margery to acknowledge this openly to her family: "I suppose, an ye tell them sadly the truth, they would not damn their souls for us." She at last confessed, and the matter came up before the Bishop of Norwich for judgment. In spite of all the bullying of the family, and the flagrant partiality of the Bishop, the girl's mother has to write and tell Sir John how "Your sister . . . rehearsed what she had said [when she plighted her troth to Calle], and said, if those words made it not sure, she said boldly that she would make that surer ere that she went thence, for she said she thought in her conscience she was bound, whatsoever the words weren. These lewd words grieved me and her grandam as much as all the remnant." The Bishop still delayed judgment on the chance of finding "other things against [Calle] that might cause the letting thereof;" and meanwhile the mother turned Margery out into the street; so that the Bishop himself had to find her a decent lodging while he kept her waiting for his decision. But to annul this plain contract needed

grosser methods of injustice than the Pastons had influence to compass, and Calle not only got his wife at last, but was taken back into the family service.* Troilus and Criseyde, having political forces arrayed against them, might indeed have failed tragically of their marriage in the end; but there was at least no reason why they should not fight for it as stoutly as the prosaic Norfolk bailiff did—if only the idea had ever entered into one or other of their heads!

Another tacit assumption of the chivalric love-code comes out clearly in the Knight's Tale, and even goes some way to explain the Franklin's; though this latter evidently recounts an old Breton lay in which the perspective is as frankly fantastic as the landscape of a miniature. The honest commentator Benvenuto da Imola is at great pains to assure us that Dante's *amor, che a nullo amato amar perdona* was not an exhaustive statement of actual fact; and that even the kindest ladies sometimes remained obdurate to the prayers of the most meritorious suitors. What is to happen, then? The hero may, of course, sometimes die; but not always; that would be too monotonous. The solution here, as in so many other cases, lies in a poetic paraphrase of too prosaic facts. The Duc de Berri, who was a great connoisseur and a man of the most refined tastes, bought at an immense sacrifice of money the most delicate little countess in the market: she, of course, had no choice at all in the matter. At an equal sacrifice of blood, first Arcite and then Palamon won the equally passive Emelye, who, when Theseus had set her up as a prize to the better fighter, could only pray that she might either avoid them both, or at least fall to him who loved her best in his inmost heart. At a cost of equal suffering, though in a different way, Aurelius won the unwilling Dorigen—for his subsequent generosity is beside the present purpose. The reader's sympathy, in medieval romance, is nearly

* "Paston Letters" (ed. Gairdner, 1900), ii., 364; iv., ccxc.

always enlisted for the pursuing man. If only he can show sufficient valour, or suffer long enough, he must have the prize, and the lady is sure to shake down comfortably enough sooner or later.* The idea is not, of course, peculiar to medieval poetry, but the frequency with which it there occurs supplies another answer to the main question of this chapter. Why, if medieval marriages were really so business-like, is medieval love-poetry so transcendental? It is not, in fact, by any means so transcendental as it seems on the surface; neither Palamon nor Arcite, at the bottom of all his extravagant protestations of humble worship, feels the least scruple in making Emelye the prize of a series of swashing blows at best, and possibly of a single lucky thrust. The chance of Shakespeare's caskets does at least give Portia to the man whom her heart had already chosen; but the similar chances and counter-chances of the Knight's Tale simply play shuttlecock with a helpless and unwilling girl. Under the spell of Chaucer's art, we know quite well that Palamon and Emelye lived very happily ever afterwards; but the Knight's Tale gives us no reason to doubt the overwhelming evidence that, while heroes in poetry conquered their wives with their right arm, plain men in prose openly bargained for them.

* Few tales illustrate more clearly the woman's duty of accepting any knight who made himself sufficiently miserable about her, than that of Boccaccio, which Dryden has so finely versified under the name of Theodore and Honoria. Equally significant is one of the "Gesta Romanorum" (ed. Swan., No. XXVIII.).

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREAT WAR

"Ce voyons bien, qu'au temps présent
La guerre si commune éprend,
Qu'a peine y a nul labourer
Lequel a son métier se prend :
Le prêtre laist le sacrement, [laisse
Et le vilain le charruer,
Tous vont aux armes travailler.
Si Dieu ne pense à l'amender,
L'on peut douter prochainement
Que tout le mond doit reverser."

GOWER, "Mirour," 24097

OF all the causes that tended in Chaucer's time to modify the old ideals of knighthood, none perhaps was more potent than the Hundred Years' War. Unjust as it was on both sides—for the cause of Philippe de Valois cannot be separated from certain inexcusable manœuvres of his predecessors on the French throne—it was the first thoroughly national war on so large a scale since the institution of chivalry. No longer merely feudal levies, but a whole people on either side is gradually involved in this struggle; and its military lessons anticipate, to a certain extent, those of the French Revolutionary Wars. Even in Froissart's narrative, the greatest heroes of Crécy are the English archers; and the Welsh knifemen by their side play a part undreamed of in earlier feudal warfare. "When the Genoese were assembled together and began to approach, they made a great cry to abash the Englishmen, but they stood still and stirred not for all that; then the Genoese again the second time made

another fell cry, and stept forward a little, and the Englishmen removed not one foot; thirdly, again they cried, and went forth till they came within shot; then they shot fiercely with their cross-bows. Then the English archers stept forth one pace and let fly their arrows so wholly together and so thick, that it seemed snow. . . . And ever still the Englishmen shot whereas they saw thickest press; the sharp arrows ran into the men of arms and into their horses, and many fell, horse and men. . . . And also among the Englishmen there were certain rascals that went afoot with great knives, and they went in among the men of arms, and slew and murdered many as they lay on the ground, both earls, barons, knights and squires, whereof the king of England was after displeased, for he had rather they had been taken prisoners."

Those "certain rascals" did not only kill certain knights, they killed also the old idea of Knighthood. From that time forward the art of war, which had so long been practised under the frequent restraint of certain aristocratic conventions, took a great leap in the direction of modern business methods. The people were concerned now; and they had grown, as they are apt to grow, inconveniently in earnest. There is a peculiarly living interest for modern England in the story of that army which at Crécy won the first of a series of victories astounding to all Christendom. Only a few months after Chaucer's unlucky campaign in France, Petrarch had travelled across to Paris, and recorded his impressions in a letter. "The English . . . have overthrown the ancient glories of France by victories so numerous and unexpected that this people, which formerly was inferior to the miserable Scots, has now (not to speak of that lamentable and undeserved fall of a great king which I cannot recall without a sigh) so wasted with fire and sword the whole kingdom of France that I, when I last crossed the country on business, could scarce believe it to be the same land

which I had seen before."* The events which so startled Petrarch were indeed immediately attributable to the business qualities and the ambitions of two English kings; but their ultimate cause lay far deeper. During all the first stages of the war, in which the English superiority was most marked, the conflict was practically between the French feudal forces and the English national levies. While French kings ignored the duty of every man to serve in defence of his own home, or remembered it only as an excuse for extorting money instead of personal service, Edward III. brought the vast latent forces of his whole kingdom, and (what was perhaps even more important) its full business energies, to bear against a chivalry which at its best had been unpractical in its exclusiveness, and was now already decaying. "Edward I. and III. . . . (and this makes their reigns a decisive epoch in the history of the Middle Ages, as well as in that of England) were the real creators of modern infantry. We must not, however, ascribe the honour of this creation only to the military genius of the two English Kings; they were driven to it by necessity, the mother of invention. The device which they used is essentially the same which has been employed in every age by countries of small extent and therefore of scanty population, viz. compulsory military service. Although the name of *conscription* is obviously modern, the thing itself is of ancient use among the very people who know least of it nowadays; and it may be proved conclusively that Edward III., especially, practised it on a great scale. The documentary evidence for this fact is so plentiful that to draw up the briefest summary of it would be to write a whole chapter—neither the least interesting nor the least novel, be it said—of English history; and that is no part of my plan here." So wrote Siméon Luce, the greatest French specialist on the period, thirty

* Quoted by S. Luce, "Bertrand du Guesclin," 1882, p. 124.

years ago; but the point which he here makes so clearly has hardly yet been fully grasped by English writers.* It may therefore be worth while to bring forward here some specimens of the mass of evidence to which Luce alludes. Compulsory service is, of course, prehistoric and universal; few nations could have survived in the past unless all their citizens had been ready to fight for them in case of need; and the decadence of imperial Rome began with the time when her populace demanded to be fed at the public expense, and defended by hired troops. In principle, therefore, even 14th-century France recognized the liability of every citizen to serve, while England had not only the principle but the practice. Her old Fyrd, the Anglo-Saxon militia system, was reorganized by Henry II. and again by Edward I. By the latter's "Statute of Winchester" every able-bodied man was bound not only to possess arms on a scale proportionate to his wealth, but also to learn their use. A fresh impulse was given to this military training by Edward I., who learned from his Welsh enemies that the longbow, already a well-known weapon among his own subjects, was far superior in battle to the crossbow. Edward, therefore, gradually set about training a large force of English archers. Falkirk (1298) was the first important battle in which the archery was used in scientific combination with cavalry; Bannockburn (1314) was the last in which the English repeated the old blunder of relying on mounted knights and men-at-arms, and allowing the infantry to act as a more or less disordered mass. While Philippe de Valois was raising money by the suicidal expedients of taxing bowstrings and ordaining general levies from which every one was expected to redeem himself by a money fine, Edward III. was giving the strictest orders that archery should take precedence

* The essentially compulsory foundation of Edward III.'s armies, for at least a great part of his reign, seems to have been overlooked even by Prof. Oman in his valuable "Art of War in the Middle Ages."

of all other sports in England, and that the country should furnish him all the men he needed for his wars.* Of all the documents to which Luce refers (and which are even more numerous than he could have guessed thirty years ago) let us here glance at two or three which bring the whole system visibly before us. In this matter, as in several others, the clearest evidence is to be found among Mr. Hudson's invaluable gleanings from the Norwich archives.† He has printed and analyzed a number of documents which show the working of the militia system in the city between 1355 and 1370—that is, at a time when it is generally asserted that we were conducting the French wars on the voluntary system. In these documents we find that the Statute of Winchester was being worked quite as strictly as we are entitled to expect of any medieval statute, and a great deal more strictly than the average. The city did in fact provide, and periodically review, an armed force equal in numbers to rather more than one-tenth of its total population—a somewhat larger proportion, that is, than would be furnished by the modern system of conscription on the Continent. Many of these men, of course, turned out with no more than the minimum club and knife; the next step was to add a sword or an axe to these primitive weapons, and so on through the archers to the numerous "half-armed men," who had in addition to their offensive weapons a plated doublet with visor and iron gauntlets, and finally the "fully-armed," who had in addition a shirt of mail under the doublet, a neck-piece and arm-plates, and whose total equipment must have cost some £30 or £40 of modern money. Mr. Hudson also notes that "it is plain that the Norwich archers were many of them men of good standing."

* Froissart, ed. Luce, i., 401. It was at this time that Edward also proclaimed the duty of teaching French for military purposes, as noted in Chap. I. of this book.

† "Norwich Militia in the 14th Century" (Norfolk and Norwich Arch. Soc.), vol. xiv., p. 263.

Moreover, this small amount of compulsion was found in medieval England, as in modern Switzerland, to stimulate rather than to repress the volunteer energies of the nation. Not only did shooting become the favourite national sport, but many of whom we might least have expected such self-sacrifice came forward gladly to fight side by side with their fellow-citizens for hearth and home. In 1346, when the Scots invaded England under the misapprehension that none remained to defend the country but "ploughmen and shepherds and feeble or broken-down chaplains," they found among the powerful militia force which met them many parsons who were neither feeble nor infirm. Crowds of priests were among those who trooped out from Beverley and York, and other northern towns, to a victory of which Englishmen have more real reason to be proud than of any other in our early history. Marching with sword and quiver on their thigh and the good six-foot bow under their arm, they took off shoes and stockings at the town gates and started barefoot, with chants and litanies, upon that righteous campaign. In 1360, again, when there was a scare of invasion and all men from sixteen to sixty were called out, then "bishops, abbots, and priors, rectors, vicars, and chaplains were as ready as the abbots [*sic*] had been, some to be men-at-arms and some to be archers . . . and the beneficed clergy who could not serve in person hired substitutes." In 1383 priests and monks were fighting even among the so-called crusaders whom Bishop Despenser led against the French in Flanders.*

To have so large a proportion of the nation thus trained for home defence was in itself a most important military asset, for it freed the hands of the army which was on foreign service, and enabled it to act without misgivings as to what might be happening at home. This was in fact the militia which, while Edward III.

* Knighton (R. S.), ii., 42, 44, 109.

was with his great army at Crécy and Calais, inflicted on the Scottish invaders at Neville's Cross one of the most crushing defeats in their history, and added one more crowned head to the collection of noble prisoners in London.* But, more than this, it formed a recruiting-field which alone enabled English armies, far from their base, to hold their own against the forces of a country which at that time had an enormous numerical superiority in population. It had always been doubtful how far the militia was bound to serve abroad. Edward III. himself had twice been forced to grant immunity by statute (first and twenty-fifth years), but with the all-important saving clause "except under great urgency." Such great urgency was in fact constantly pleaded, and the cities did not care to contest the point. Several calls were made on Norwich for 120 men at a time, a proportion which, in figures of modern town population, would be roughly equivalent to 1200 from Northampton, 8000 from Birmingham, and 10,000 from Glasgow. In the year before Crécy the less populous town of Lynn was assessed at 100 men "of the strongest and most vigorous of the said town, each armed with breastplate, helmet, and gauntlets . . . for the defence and rescue of Our duchy of Aquitaine." The drain on London at the same time was enormous, as I have already had occasion to note in Chapter X. The briefest summary of the evidence contained in Dr. Sharpe's Letter-Books will suffice here. On the outbreak of war in 1337, in addition to a considerable tribute of ships, the city was called upon for a contingent of 500 men—which would be equivalent to the enormous tribute of 50,000 soldiers from modern London. Presently "the king . . . took occasion to find fault with the city's dilatoriness in carrying out his orders, and complained

* The Scots themselves had found out long before this who were their most formidable enemies. Sir James Douglas had been accustomed to cut off the right hand or put out the right eye of any archer whom he could catch.

of the want of physique in the men that were being supplied. At the request of John de Pulteneye, who was then occupying the Mayoral chair for the fourth time, he consented to accept 200 able-bodied archers at once, and to postpone the selection of the remainder of the force. At the same time he issued letters patent declaring that the aid furnished by the city should not become a precedent. The names of the 200 archers that went to Gascony are set out in the Letter-Book. . . ." But Royal promises are unstable. Another contingent of 100 was sent soon after. In 1338 London was ordered to fit out four ships with 300 men to join the home defence fleet at Winchelsea; the citizens protested so strongly that this was reduced by a half. In 1340 the King seized all ships of forty tons' burden and raised 300 more soldiers from London, who took part in the glorious victory of Sluys. In 1342 another levy; in 1344, 400 archers again; in 1346 "the sheriffs of London were called upon to make proclamation for all persons between the ages of sixteen and sixty to take up arms and to be at Portsmouth by March 26th" —a command which, however interpreted with the usual elasticity, must yet have produced several hundred recruits for the army which fought at Crécy. Next year two ships were demanded with 180 armed men, and two more again later in the year. In 1350 two London ships with 170 armed men were raised for the battle of Les Espagnols sur Mer. In 1355, again, 520 soldiers were demanded from the city.

While this was going on in the towns, the Berkeley papers give us similar evidence of conscription in the counties, though the documents are not here continuous. In 1332 the Sheriff of Gloucester was bidden to raise 100 men for service in Ireland; next year 500 for Scotland. Three years later the country was obliged to send 2500 to Scotland, besides the Gloucester city and Bristol contingents. Then comes the French war. In 1337 and 1338 Lord Berkeley spends most of

his time mustering and arraying soldiers for France. In the latter year, and again in 1339, Edward commissions him to array and arm *all the able men* in the country, as others were doing throughout the kingdom; 563 were thus arrayed in the shire, and Smyth very plausibly conjectures that the small number is due to Lord Berkeley's secret favour for his own county. In 1345, when Edward made the great effort which culminated at Crécy, the county and the town of Bristol had to raise and arm 622 men "to be conducted whither Lord Berkeley should direct." And so on until 1347, when there is a significant addition of plenary powers to punish all refractory and rebellious persons, a riot having apparently broken out on account of these levies.* From this time forward the scattered notices never refer to levies for service abroad; but they are still frequent for home defence, and Smyth proudly records in three folio volumes the numbers of trained and disciplined men in his own time (James I.), with their "names and several statures," in the single hundred of Berkeley. The national militia always remained the most valuable recruiting ground, and kept up that love of archery for which the English were famous down to Elizabeth's days and beyond; yet, for purely foreign wars, Edward's frequent drains broke the national patience before the end of his reign. The evidence from London points most plainly in this direction. In 1369 at last we find the tell-tale notice: "It was frequently easier for the City to furnish the King with money than with men. Hence we find it recorded that at the end of August of this year the citizens had agreed to raise a sum of £2000

* Compare the interesting case in Gross, "Office of Coroner," p. 74. Two conscripts, on their way to join the army, chanced to meet at Cold Ashby the constable who was responsible for their being selected; they ran him through with a lance and then took sanctuary. It is significant that they were not hanged, but carried off to the army; the King needed every stout arm he could muster.

for the king in lieu of furnishing him with a military contingent." Already by this time the tide had turned against us in France; not that the few English troops failed to keep up their superiority in the field, but Du Guesclin played a waiting game and wore us steadily out. Castle after castle was surprised; isolated detachments were crushed one by one; reinforcements were difficult to raise; and before Edward's death three seaports alone were left of all his French conquests. He had at one time wielded an army almost like Napoleon's—a mass of professional soldiers raised from a nation in arms. But, like Napoleon, he had used it recklessly. Such material could not be supplied *ad finnitum*, and our victories began again only after a period of comparative rest, when France was crippled by the madness of her King and divided by internecine feuds.

Edward's conscription, it will be seen, was somewhat old-fashioned compared with that of modern France and Germany. Men were enrolled for a campaign partly by bargain, partly by force; and, once enrolled, the wars generally made them into professional soldiers for life. No doubt Shakespeare's caricature in the second part of *King Henry IV.* may help us a little here, so long as we make due allowance for his comic purpose and the rustiness of the institution in his time. For already in Chaucer's lifetime there was a great change in our system of over-sea service. As the sources of conscription began to dry up, the King fell back more and more upon the expedient of hiring troops: he would get some great captain to contract himself by indenture to bring so many armed men at a given time, and the contractor in his turn entered into a number of sub-contracts with minor leaders to contribute to his contingent. Under this system a very large proportion of aliens came into our armies; but even then we kept the same organization and principles as in those earlier hosts which were really contingents of English militia.

An army thus drawn from a people accustomed to

some real measure of self-government inevitably broke through many feudal traditions; and from a very early stage in the war we find important commands given to knights and squires who had fought their way up from the ranks. The most renowned of all these English soldiers of fortune, Sir John Hawkwood, married the sister of Clarence's Violante, with a dowry of a million florins; yet he is recorded to have begun as a common archer. He was probably a younger son of a good Essex house; but this again simply emphasizes the democratic and business-like organization of the English army compared with its rivals. Du Guesclin, though he was the eldest son of one of the smaller French nobles, found his promotion terribly retarded by his lack of birth and influence. He was probably the most distinguished leader in France before he even received the honour of knighthood. At the date of the battle of Cocherel he had fought with success for more than twenty years, and was by far the most distinguished captain present; yet he owed the command on that day only to the rare good fortune that the greatest noble present recognized his own comparative incapacity, and that the rest agreed in offering to fight under a man of less social distinction but incomparably greater experience than any of themselves. In the English army there would from the first have been no doubt about the real commander—Hawkwood, perhaps, who was believed to have begun life as a tailor's apprentice, or Knolles, whom this war had taken from the weaver's loom.

Even the magnificent Edward, with all his Round Table and his Order of the Garter, was forced to recognize clearly that war is above all things a business. In the earlier days he did indeed defy Philippe de Valois to single combat; but during the campaign of Crécy he made light of the laws of chivalry. He had penetrated close to Paris; his army was melting away; provisions were scarce; and the French had broken

the bridges in his rear. At this point Philip sent him a regular chivalric challenge in form to meet him with his army on a field and a day to be fixed at his own choice, within certain reasonable limits. Edward returned a misleading answer, made a corresponding feint with his troops, rapidly rebuilt the bridge of Poissy, and had crossed to a place of safety before Philip realized that a clever piece of strategy had been executed under his very nose and behind the forms of chivalry. Then only did Edward throw off the mask, and declare his intention of choosing his own place and time for battle. His Royal great-grandson was even more business-like. When the French nobles asked Henry V. to give a great tourney in honour of his marriage, as had always been the custom, he refused in the bluntest and most soldierly fashion. He and his men, he replied, would be engaged for the next few weeks at the siege of Sens; if any gallant Frenchman wished to break a lance or two, he might come and break them there. While this mimic warfare was at its highest favour in France, the three Edwards had always kept jealous control over it in England, and constantly forbidden tournaments without Royal licence. This policy is, no doubt, partly explained by some deference to ecclesiastical prohibitions, and partly by the disorders to which jousts constantly gave rise; but we may pretty safely infer (with Luce) that our kings had little belief in the direct value of the knightly tournament as a school of warfare, and that here, as on so many other points, the practical genius of the race broke even through class prejudices.*

It is impossible better to sum up the results of

* Tournaments not infrequently gave rise to treacherous murders and vendettas, as in the case of Sir Walter Mauny's father (Froissart, Buchon., i., 199). Compare also the scandal caused by the women who used to attend them in men's clothes (Knighton, ii., p. 57). Luce, however, very much overstates the Royal objections to jousts (pp. 113, 141). He evidently fails to realize what a large number of authorized tourneys were held by Edward III.

English business methods in warfare than in the words which are forced reluctantly from M. Luce's impartial pen. "In my opinion, five or six thousand English archers, thus drilled and equipped, and supported by an equal number of knifemen, would always have beaten even considerably larger forces of the bravest chivalry in the world—at least in a frontal attack and as a matter of sheer hard fighting. Such, moreover, seems to have been the opinion of Bertrand du Guesclin, the most renowned captain of the Middle Ages, who never fought a great pitched battle against a real English army if he could possibly help it. At Cocherel his adversaries were mostly Gascons, and at Pontvallain he crushed Knolles's rear-guard by one of those startling marches of which he had the secret; but he was beaten at Auray and Navarette." Gower might complain without too poetical exaggeration that the vortex of war swept away not only the serf from his plough but the very priest from his altar; yet even Chaucer's Poor Parson may well have conceded that, if we must have an army at all, we might as well have it as efficient and as truly national as possible.

BODIAM CASTLE, KENT

BUILT DURING CHAUCER'S LIFETIME BY SIR EDWARD DALYNGRUGGE, [illegible]

CHAPTER XIX

THE BURDEN OF THE WAR

"[Edward], the first of English nation
That ever had right unto the crown of France
By succession of blood and generation
Of his mother withouten variance,
The which me thinketh should be of most substance;
For Christ was king by his mother of Judee,
Which surer side is ay, as thinketh me."

HARDYNG, "Chronicle," 335

IT must, however, be admitted that so terrible a weapon in so rough an age was only too dangerous. When Edward III. found that his cousin of France not only meant to deal treacherously with him in Aquitaine, but had also allied himself with our deadly enemies of Scotland, he found a very colourable excuse for retaliation by raising a claim to the throne of France. But for the Salic law, which forbade inheritance through a female, Edward would undoubtedly be, if not the rightful heir, at least nearer than Philippe de Valois, who now sat on that throne. The Biblical colour which he gave to his claim by pleading the precedent of "Judee" was of course the after-thought of some ingenious theologian; the real strength of Edward's claim lay in his army. To appreciate the strength of Edward's temptations here, we must imagine modern Germany adding to her other armaments a navy capable of commanding the seas, a Kaiser fettered by even less constitutional checks than at present, and sharing with his people even greater incitements to cupidity. Beyond the prospect, always dazzling enough to a statesman, of an enormous indemnity and a substantial

increase of territory, medieval warfare offered even to the meanest English soldier only too probable hopes of riot and booty. Froissart, though he seldom feels very deeply for the mere people, describes our first march through the defenceless districts of Normandy in words which make us understand why this unhappy, unprepared country could only mark time for the next hundred years, while we, in spite of all our faults and follies, went on slowly from strength to strength. England, with her own four or five millions and a little help from Aquitaine, rode roughshod again and again over the disorganized ten millions north of the Loire; while the French—even during those thirty years of union which elapsed between the recovery of Guienne and the murder of the Duke of Orleans—frequently enough burned our southern seaports, but never penetrated more than a few miles inland in the face of our shire-levies.

The contrast is in every way characteristic of Chaucer's England, and Froissart's description is of the deepest significance, not only to the student of political and social history, but even to the literary historian. It has been noted that Chaucer's deepest note of pathos is for the sorrows of the helpless—the irremediable sufferings of those whose frailty has tempted murder or oppression, and to whom the poet himself can offer nothing but a tear on earth and some hope of redress in heaven. Let us remember, then, that Chaucer fought in two French campaigns, identical in kind and not even differing much in degree from the invasion of 1346 which Froissart describes. "They came to a good port and to a good town called Barfleur, the which incontinent was won, for they within gave up for fear of death. Howbeit, for all that the town was robbed, and much gold and silver there found, and rich jewels; there was found so much riches, that the boys and villains of the host set nothing by good furred gowns; they made all the men of the town to issue out and to go

into the ships, because they would not suffer them to be behind them for fear of rebelling again. After the town of Barfleur was thus taken and robbed without brenning, then they spread abroad in the country and did what they list, for there was none to resist them. At last they came to a great and a rich town called Cherbourg; the town they won and robbed it, and brent part thereof, but into the castle they could not come, it was so strong and well furnished with men of war. Then they passed forth and came to Montebourg, and took it and robbed and brent it clean. In this manner they brent many other towns in that country and won so much riches, that it was marvel to reckon it. Then they came to a great town well closed called Carentan, where there was also a strong castle and many soldiers within to keep it. Then the lords came out of their ships and fiercely made assault; the burgesses of the town were in great fear of their lives, wives and children; they suffered the Englishmen to enter into the town against the will of all the soldiers that were there; they put all their goods to the Englishmen's pleasures, they thought that most advantage. When the soldiers within saw that, they went into the castle; the Englishmen went into the town, and two days together they made sore assaults, so that when they within saw no succour, they yielded up, their lives and goods saved, and so departed. The Englishmen had their pleasure of that good town and castle, and when they saw they might not maintain to keep it, they set fire therein and brent it, and made the burgesses of the town to enter into their ships, as they had done with them of Barfleur, Cherbourg and Montebourg, and of other towns that they had won on the sea-side. . . . The lord Godfrey as marshal rode forth with five hundred men of arms, and rode off from the king's battle a six or seven leagues, in brenning and exiling the country, the which was plentiful of everything — the granges full of corn, the houses full of all riches, rich

burgesses, carts and chariots, horse, swine, muttons and other beasts; they took what them list and brought into the king's host; but the soldiers made no count to the king nor to none of his officers of the gold and silver that they did get; they kept that to themselves. . . . Thus by the Englishmen was brent, exiled, robbed, wasted and pilled the good, plentiful country of Normandy. . . . It was no marvel though they of the country were afraid, for before that time they had never seen men of war, nor they wist not what war or battle meant. They fled away as far as they might hear speaking of the Englishmen, and left their houses well stuffed, and granges full of corn, they wist not how to save and keep it." Hitherto Froissart has only deigned to record the fire and pillage; but the melancholy catalogue now goes on to Coutances, Saint-Lô, and Caen, where at last the citizens fought boldly in defence of their unwalled town, "greater than any city in England except London." In spite of their numbers, and of an obstinate courage which extorted the admiration of their adversaries, the half-armed and untrained citizens were at last hopelessly beaten, and the town given over to the infuriated soldiery; though here Sir Thomas Holland, an old Crusader, who might have sat for Chaucer's Knight, "rode into the streets and saved many lives of ladies, damosels, and cloisterers from defoiling, for the soldiers were without mercy." *

At a later stage, when the horrors of civil war were added to those of the English invasion, the Norman chronicler, Thomas Basin, describes the fertile country between Loire, Seine, and Somme as a mere wilderness, half overgrown with brambles and thickets. "Moreover, whatsoever husbandry there was in the aforesaid lands, was only in the neighbourhood and suburbs of cities, towns, or castles, for so far as a watchman's eye from some tower or point of vantage could reach to see robbers coming upon them; then would the watchman

* Froissart, Globe, 94-97.

sound the alarm . . . on a bell or hunting horn, or other bugle. Which alarms and incursions were so common and frequent in very many places, that when the oxen and plough-horses were loosed from the plough, hearing the watchman's signal, they took flight and galloped away forthwith of their own accord, by the force of habit, to their places of refuge; nay, the very sheep and swine had learnt by long use to do the same." The French Bishop Jean-Jouvenel des Ursins, in 1433, speaks of the sufferings of his diocese in language too painful and too direct to be reproduced here.*

To realize the full force of these descriptions, it is necessary to compare them with those of the good monk Walsingham, who drily records how Edward "attacked, took, sacked, and burnt Caen, and many other cities after it." It is only when Edward comes back from Calais with his victorious army that Walsingham waxes eloquent. "Then folk thought that a new sun was rising over England, for the abundance of peace, the plenty of possessions, and the glory of victory. For there was no woman of any name, but had somewhat of the spoils of Caen, Calais, and other cities beyond the seas. Furs, feather-beds, or household utensils, tablecloths and necklaces, cups of gold or silver, linen and sheets, were to be seen scattered about England in different houses. Then began the English ladies to wax wanton in the vesture of the French women; and as the latter grieved to have lost their goods, so the former rejoiced to have obtained them."† In an age of brute force, when popes hesitated no more than kings to shed rivers of blood for a few square miles of territory, when every sailor was a potential pirate

* Denifle, "La Désolation des Eglises," etc., vol. i., pp. 497, 504, 514. Two pages from English chroniclers are almost as bad as any of the iniquities printed in Father Denifle's book, viz. the sack of Winchelsea (Knighton, ii., 109) and Sir John Arundel's shipload of nuns from Southampton (Walsingham, an. 1379; told briefly in "Social England," illd. ed., vol. ii. p. 260).

† Cf. Knighton ii., 102.

and every baron a potential highwayman *—in such an age as this, no nation could have resisted the lust of conquest when it had once realized the wealth and supine helplessness of a neighbour. "The English," wrote Froissart, when old age had brought him to ponder less on feats of arms and more on eternity, "The English will never love or honour their king but if he be victorious, and a lover of arms and war against his neighbours, and especially against such as are greater and richer than themselves. . . . Their land is more fulfilled of riches and all manner of goods when they are at war, than in times of peace; and therein are they born and ingrained, nor could a man make them understand the contrary. . . . They take delight and solace in battles and in slaughter: covetous and envious are they above measure of other men's wealth." † But when exhausted France could no longer yield more than a mere livelihood to the armies which overran her, then at last things found their proper level, and the nation wearied of bloodshed. "Universal conscription proved then as now the great inculcator of peace. To the burgher called from the loom and the dyeing pit and the market stall to take down his bow or dagger, war was a hard and ungrateful service, where reward and plunder were dealt out with a niggardly hand; and men conceived a deep hatred of strife and disorder of which they had measured all the misery." ‡

* Green, "Town Life," i., 130. "At the close of the 14th century a certain knight, Baldwin of Radington, with the help of John of Stanley, raised eight hundred fighting men 'to destroy and hurt the commons of Chester'; and these stalwart warriors broke into the abbey, seized the wine, and dashed the furniture in pieces, and when the mayor and sheriff came to the rescue nearly killed the sheriff. When in 1441 the Archbishop of York determined to fight for his privileges in Ripon Fair, he engaged two hundred men-at-arms from Scotland and the Marches at sixpence or a shilling a day, while a Yorkshire gentleman, Sir John Plumpton, gathered seven hundred men; and at the battle that ensued, more than a thousand arrows were discharged by them."

† Ed. Luce, i, 213, 214; cf. 312.

‡ Mrs. Green, *l. c.*, i., 131.

But, terribly as it might press upon our enemies in those days, when the private soldier had almost an unrestricted right of pillage, the Statute of Winchester was none the less necessary to the full development of our political freedom. Indeed, it is scarcely a paradox to say that those civic and Parliamentary liberties which made such rapid strides during the sixty years of Chaucer's lifetime owed as much to this burden of personal service as to anything else. To begin with, it was a police system also; and, for by far the greater part of the country, the only police system. When the hue and cry was raised after a robber or a murderer, all were then bound to tumble out of doors and join in the chase with such arms as they had, just as they were bound to turn out and take their share in the national war. When all the disorders of the 14th century have been counted up in England, they are as dust in the balance compared with those of foreign countries. The Peasants' Rising of 1381 astonishes modern historians in nothing so much as in its sudden rise, its sudden end when the King had promised redress, and its comparative orderliness in disorder. But, on second thoughts, does not this seem natural enough among a people accustomed to rough military discipline, and liable any day to be arrayed, as they had laboured, side by side?* Lastly, we have the repeated testimony of our most determined enemies to the superiority of English over French discipline. Bishop des Ursins, in a letter written to the French Parliament in 1433, describes the worst horrors of the war as having been committed by French upon French; and he expressly adds, "at present, things are somewhat amended by the coming of the English." This modified compliment he repeats again in a letter to Charles VII., adding, "[the English] did indeed at least keep their assurances once given, and also their safe conducts"; while the

* This point is treated more fully in the next chapter.

French (as he complains) often made light of their own engagements.* Indeed, the whole array of documents collected by the astounding diligence of the late sub-prefect of the Vatican Library is calculated—we may not say, to make us read with equanimity the tale of horrors perpetrated by our countrymen in France—but at least to shift much of the blame from the individuals to the times in which they lived. The English were not cruel merely because they were strong; the weaker French were on the whole more cruel; nowhere has the bitter proverb *Gallus Gallo lupus* been more terribly justified. The main difference was that, in an age when a man must needs be hammer or anvil, our national character and organization, no doubt assisted also by fortune, enabled us to play the former part. Father Denifle shows very clearly how even great and good Frenchmen like Des Ursins, living in Joan of Arc's time, were ashamed of her because she seemed to have failed. The impulses of actual chivalry—apart from its nominal code—were at best even more capricious in France than in England. Knightly mercy and forbearance seldom even professed to include the mere rank and file of a conquered army. When a place was taken by storm, it was common to ransom the officers and kill the rest without mercy. Here and there a knight earns special praise from Froissart by pleading for the lives of the unhappy privates who had fought as bravely as himself; but I remember no case of one who actually insisted on sharing the fate of his men. The Black Prince tarnished his fair fame by the massacre of Limoges; yet in this he did but follow the example of the saintly Charles de Blois, who thanked God for victory in the cathedral of Quimper while his men were making a hell of the captured city. His orisons finished, Charles stayed the slaughter; and the Black Prince, after watching the butchery of Limoges from his litter, and turning his face away from women and

* Denifle, *l. c.*, pp. 497, 504.

children who knelt to implore his mercy, was at last appeased by the manly spectacle of three French warriors fighting boldly for their lives against three Englishmen.* Their courage saved them, and what we might now call their conqueror's sporting instincts; just as Queen Philippa's timely pleading saved the citizens of Calais. All honour to the noble impulse in both cases; but greater honour still to the manly independence and discipline which saved our English commonalty from the need of appealing to a conqueror's mercy; which defended them alike from robbers at home and Frenchmen over the seas, and left us free to work out our own liberties without foreign interference. No doubt the Wars of the Roses were partly a legacy of our unjust aggression in France; but English civil wars have been among the least disorderly the world has known; in all of them the citizen-levies have fought stoutly on the side of liberty; and for centuries after Chaucer's death the national militia was recognized as a strong counterpoise to the unconstitutional tendencies of the standing army.

Of all this Froissart recognized little indeed; though we, in the light of a hundred other documents, can see how all went on under Froissart's eyes. He saw clearly that this was the most warlike nation in Europe; he saw also that it was the most democratic; but he seems neither to have traced any connection here on the one hand, nor on the other to have been troubled by any sense of contrast; it was not in his genius to look for causes, but rather to repeat with child-like vivacity what he saw and heard. Yet for us, to whom nothing in Chaucer's England can be more interesting than to watch, under the great trees of the forest, the springing of that undergrowth which was in time to become the present British people, it is delightful to turn from

* "More than three thousand men, women, and children were beheaded that day. God have mercy on their souls, for I trow they were martyrs." Froissart (Globe), 201.

pictures of mere successful bloodshed to Froissart's bitter-sweet judgments on the national character. "Englishmen suffer indeed for a season, but in the end they repay so cruelly that it may stand as a great warning; for no man may mock them; the lord who governs them rises and lays him down to rest in sore peril of his life. . . . And specially there is no people under the sun so perilous in the matter of its common folk as they are in England. For in England the nature and condition of the nobles is very far different from that of the common folk and villeins; for the gentlefolk are of loyal and noble condition, and the common people is of a fell, perilous, proud and disloyal condition: and wheresoever the people would show their fierceness and their power, the nobles would not last long after. But now for a long time they have been at good accord together, for the nobles ask nothing of the people but what is of full reason; moreover none would suffer them to take aught from him without payment—nay, not an egg or a hen. The tradesmen and labourers of England live by the travail of their hands, and the nobles live on their own rents and revenues, and if the kings vex them they are repaid; not that the king can tax his people at pleasure, no! nor the people would not or could not suffer it. There are certain ordinances and covenants settled upon the staple of wool, wherefrom the king is assisted beyond his own rents and revenues; and when they go to war, that covenant is doubled. England is best kept of all lands in the world; otherwise they could by no means live together; and it behoveth well that a king who is their lord should order his ways after them and bow to their will in many matters; and if he do the contrary, so that evil come thereof, bitterly then shall he rue it, as did this king Edward II." "And men said then in London and throughout England 'we must reform and take a new ordinance [with our king]; for that which we have had hath brought us sore weariness and travail,

and this kingdom of ours is not worth a straw without a good head; whereas we have had one as bad as a man can find. . . . We have no use for a sluggish and heavy king who seeketh too much his own ease and pleasure; we would rather slay half a hundred of such, one after the other, than fail to get a king to our use and liking." "The King of England must needs obey his people, and do all their will." *

We with our present liberties must not of course take these words of Froissart's too literally; but they must have conveyed a very definite and, on the whole, a very true impression to his French contemporaries; for no language but that of hyperbole could adequately have described the contrast between their polity and that of England. Moreover, it must be remembered that Froissart wrote this with the Peasant's Revolt not far behind him, and the deposition of Richard II. fresh in his mind. The truth is that the feudal system was already slowly but surely breaking down in England: our lower classes, with recognized constitutional rights on the one hand, and on the other hand a rough military organization and discipline of their own, were, in many ways, far more free in 1389 than the French peasants of 1789. Chaucer and Froissart always felt at the bottom of their hearts this coming of the People; it lends a breadth to their thoughts and colour to their brush even when they paint the gorgeous pageantry of overripe feudalism; labouring the more earnestly, perhaps, to record these fleeting hues because of the night which must needs come before the new day. And how vivid their pictures are! The prologue to the "Book of the Duchess," the castle garden and the tournament in the Knight's Tale, Troilus with his knights pacing the aisles of the temple to gaze on the ladies at their prayers, or riding home under Criseyde's balcony after the victorious fight: Froissart's stories of the Chaplet of Pearls, the Court of Gaston de Foix,

* Ed. Luce, pp. 214, 249, 337.

the Dance of the Wild Men, Queen Isabella's entry into London—what an enchanted palace of tapestries and stained glass we have here, and what a school of stately manners! But time, which takes away so much, brings us still more in compensation; and without treason to Chaucer or his age we may frankly admit that his perfect knight is only younger brother to Colonel Newcome, and that Froissart himself can show us no figure so deeply chivalrous as the Lawrences or the Havelocks of our later Indian Wars.

CHAPTER XX

THE POOR

"Misuse not thy bondman, the better mayst thou speed;
Though he be thine underling here, well may hap in heaven
That he win a worthier seat, and with more bliss;
For in charnel at the church churls be evil to know,
Or a knight from a knave there; know this in thine heart."
"Piers Plowman," B., vi., 46

IT has sometimes been contended in recent years that the Middle Ages lacked only our smug middle-class comfort; and that, as the upper classes were nobler, so the poor were healthier and happier then. It is probable that the latter part of this theory is at least as mistaken as the first: but the question is in itself more complicated, and we have naturally less detailed evidence in the poor man's case than in the rich man's. Among the great, we find many virtues and many vices common to both ages; but a careful comparison reveals certain grave faults which put the earlier state of society, as we might expect, at a definite and serious disadvantage. No gentleman of the present day would dream of striking his wife and daughters, of talking to them like the Knight of La Tour Landry; or like the Merchant in the presence of the Nuns, or of selling marriages and wardships in the open market. All the redeeming virtues in the world, we should feel, could not put the man who saw no harm in these things in the front rank of real gentility. Such plain and decisive methods of differentiation, however, begin to disappear as we descend the social scale; until, at the very bottom, we find little or no difference in coarseness of moral fibre between our own contemporaries and Chaucer's. For

it stands to reason that the development of the poor cannot be so rapid as that of the upper classes. In all human affairs, to him that hath shall be given; the superior energy and abilities of one family will differentiate it more and more, as life becomes more complicated, from other families which still vegetate among the mass; and in proportion as the wealth of the world increases, the gap must necessarily widen between the man who has most and the man who has least; since there have always been a certain number who possess, and are capable of possessing or keeping, virtually nothing. In that sense, the terrible contrast between wealth and poverty is undoubtedly worse in our days; but this fact in itself is as insignificant as it is unavoidable. The tramp on the highroad is not appreciably unhappier for knowing that his nothingness is contrasted nowadays with Mr. Carnegie's millions instead of de la Pole's thousands; and again, until we can find some means of distributing the accumulations of the rich among the poor without doing far more harm than good, the community loses no more by allowing a selfish man to lock up his millions, than formerly when they were only hundreds or thousands. The securities afforded by modern society for possession and accumulation of wealth do indeed often permit the capitalist to sweat his workmen deplorably; but these are the same securities which allow the workman to sleep in certain possession of his own little savings. While the capitalist is accumulating money, the foresight and self-restraint of the workmen enables them to accumulate votes, which in the long run are worth even more. Much may no doubt be done in detail by keeping in eye the simpler methods of our ancestors; but no sound principle can be modelled on an age when nothing prevented capitalists from hoarding but lack of decent security, when strikes were rare only because of penal laws against all combinations of workmen, and when the peasant was partly kept from starving by his recognized

market value as the domestic animal of his master. We could easily remedy many desperate social difficulties—for the moment at least—if we might reduce half the population of England again to the status of serfs.

"The social questions of the period cannot be understood, unless we remember that in 1381 more than half the people of England did not possess the privileges which Magna Charta secured to every 'freeman.'" * The English serf was indeed some degrees better off than his French brother, to whose lord the legist Pierre de Fontaines could write in the 13th century "by our custom there is between thee and thy villein no judge but only God." † The English serf could not be evicted, but neither could he leave his holding; he was transferred with the estate from master to master as a portion of the live stock. By custom, as the master had rights to definite services or money dues from him, so he had definite rights as against his master; but though in cases of manslaughter or maiming the serf could appeal to the king's courts, all other cases must be heard in the manor court, where the lord was judge in his own cause. Let us hear Chaucer himself on this subject, in his Parson's Tale: "Through this cursed sin of avarice and covetise come these hard lordships, through which men be distrained by tallages, customs, and carriages more than their duty or reason is: and eke take they of their bondmen amercements which might more reasonably be called extortions than amercements. Of which amercements, or ransoming of bondmen, some lords' stewards say that it is rightful, forasmuch as a churl hath no temporal thing that is not his lord's, as they say. But certes these lordships do wrong that bereave their bondmen [of] things that they never gave them." In theory, the workers had indeed a

* Trevelyan, "England in the Age of Wycliffe," 1st Edn., p. 195.

† "Conseil" (in Appendix to Ducange's "Joinville"), chap. xxi., art. 8. The writer insists strongly, at the same time, on the lord's responsibility to God for his treatment of a creature so helpless.

set-off against the Steward or Bailiff in the Reeve, elected by themselves to represent their interests before their master; but it will be noticed how Chaucer looks upon him as the lord's servant; and in "Piers Plowman" he is even more definitely put among the enemies of the people, with beadles, sheriffs, and "sisours," or jurors.* It must be remembered, too, that the general reliance everywhere on custom rather than on written law, the difference of customs on various manors, and the petty vexations constantly entailed even by those which were most certainly recognized, bred constant discontent and disputes. The heavy fine which the serf owed for sending his son to school fell, of course, only in very exceptional cases, and may be set off against the few who were enfranchized in order to enable them to take holy orders. But the *merchet*, or fine paid for marriage, must have been a bitter burden, while the *heriot*, or *mortuary*, is to modern ideas an exaction of unredeemed iniquity. In most manors, though apparently not in all, the lord claimed by this custom the best possession left by his dead tenant; and (so long as he had left not less than three head of live stock) the parish clergyman claimed the second best. The case of a widow and orphans in a struggling household is one in which no charity can ever be misplaced; yet here their natural protectors were precisely those who joined hands to plunder them; and every parish had its two licensed wreckers, who picked their perquisites from the deathbeds of the poor.† No doubt here, as elsewhere, the strict law was not always enforced, even

* "C. T." Prol., 597 ff. : "P. Plowman," C., III., 177. For the Reeve's duties, see Smyth, "Berkeleys," vol. ii., pp. 5, 22.

† "Those who demand such mortuaries are like worms preying on a corpse" (Cardinal Jacques de Vitry, quoted in Lecoy de La Marche, "Chaire Française," p. 388). Having already, in my "Medieval Studies" and my "Priests and People," dealt more fully with this and several points occurring in the succeeding chapters, I can often dispense with further references here. These exactions, though they had grown up perfectly naturally, were scarcely less resented by the peasants on that account.

though its enforcement was so definitely to the interest of the stronger party; self-interest, apart from a fellow-feeling which seldom dies out altogether, prevents a man from taxing even his horse beyond its powers; but there is definite evidence that merchets and heriots were no mere theoretical grievance. Moreover, these were only the worst of a hundred ways in which law and custom gave the lord a galling, and apparently unreasonable, hold upon the peasants; and they must needs have chafed against such a yoke as this even if their position as domestic animals had been more comfortable than it was. Let us suppose—though this needs better proof than has yet been advanced—that the serf was as well fed and housed as the modern English labourer;* suppose that he was far more of a real man than his legal status gave him a right to be; then he must only have smarted all the more, we may safely say, under his beastlike disabilities. "We are men formed in Christ's likeness, and we are kept like beasts"; such are the words which Froissart puts into the serfs' mouths. "To the sentiment" (comments a modern writer) "there is all the difference between economic compulsion, apparently the outcome of inevitable conditions, and a legal dependence upon personal caprice. Even comfortable circumstances, which he apparently enjoyed, created in the Malmesbury bondman no satisfaction with his lot. There is a pathetic ring in the words which, in his old age, he is recorded to have used, that 'if he might bring that [his freedom] aboute, it wold be more joifull to him than any worlie goode.'" Nor was this the cry of a single voice only, but also of the whole peasantry of England at that moment of the Middle Ages when they most definitely formulated their aims. "The rising of 1381 sets it beyond doubt that the peasant had grasped the conception of complete personal liberty, that he

* This is admirably discussed by Mr. Corbett in chap. vii. of "Social England."

held it degrading to perform forced labour, and that he considered freedom to be his right." *

Moreover, the general voice of medieval moralists is here on the peasants' side. It is true that (in spite of the frequent reminders of our common parentage in Adam and Eve) few men of Chaucer's day would have agreed with Wycliffe in objecting on principle to hereditary bondage; but still fewer doubted that the landlords, as a class, did in fact use their power unmercifully. "How mad" (writes Cardinal Jacques de Vitry), "how mad are those men who rejoice when sons are born to their lords!" Many knights (he says) force their serfs to labour, and give them not even bread to eat. When the knight does call his men together, as if for war, it is too often only to prey on the peasant. "Many say nowadays, when they are rebuked for having taken a cow from a poor peasant: 'Let it suffice the boor that I have left him the calf and his own life. I might do him far more harm if I would; I have taken his goose, but left him the feathers.'"

Here, again, is a still more living picture from "Piers Plowman"—

> "Then Peace came to Parliament and put up a bill,
> How that Wrong against his will his wife had y-taken
> And how he ravished Rose, Reginald's leman,
> And Margaret of her maidenhood, maugre her cheeks.
> 'Both my geese and my griskins his gadlings fetchen,
> I dare not for dread of him fight nor chide.
> He borrowed my bay steed, and brought him never again,
> Nor no farthing him-for, for nought I can plead.
> He maintaineth his men to murder mine own,
> Forestalleth my fair, fighteth in my cheapings, [markets
> Breaketh up my barn-door and beareth away my wheat;
> And taketh me but a tally for ten quarter oaten;
> And yet he beat me thereto, and lieth by my maiden,
> I am not so hardy for him up for to look.'
> The King knew he said sooth, for Conscience him told."

That this kind of thing was far less common in England

* Froissart, Buchon, ii., 150. Leadam, "Star Chamber" (Selden Soc.), p. cxxviii. Trevelyan, *l. c.*, p. 185.

than elsewhere, we have Froissart's and other evidence; but that it was far too common even in Chaucer's England there is no room whatever to doubt. As M. Jusserand has truly said, a dozen Parliamentary documents justify the poet's complaints; and he quotes an extraordinarily interesting case from the actual petition of the victims.*

The time, however, was yet unripe for such far-reaching changes as the peasants demanded. The circumstances and incidents of their revolt have been admirably described by Mr. Trevelyan, and lately in more detail by Prof. Oman; and its main events are prominent in all our histories; probably no rebellion of such magnitude was ever so sudden in its origin or its end; all was practically over in a single month. Discontent had, of course, been seething for years; yet even so definite a grievance as the Poll Tax of 1381 could not have raised half England in revolt within a few days, but for a sense of power and a rough discipline among the working-classes. For more than a century the men who were now so wronged had been compelled to keep arms, to learn their use, and to muster periodically under captains of twenties and captains of hundreds. For a whole generation Edward III. had proclaimed, at frequent intervals, that he could not meet his enemies without a fresh levy from town and country; and, under a system which allowed the purchase of substitutes, such levies fell heaviest on the lower classes. What was more natural than that these same lower classes should muster now to free the King from his other enemies—and theirs too, as they thought—incapable, bloodsucking ministers and unjust landlords? They had only to turn out as on a muster and march straight upon London, each village contingent picking up others on the way; and this is exactly what

* Vitry, "Exempla," pp. 62, 64; "P. P.," A., iv., 34 (cf. Lecoy., *l. c.*, 387); Jusserand, "Epopée Mystique," 114; and "Vie Nomade," 81, 261, 269.

they did.* The chroniclers definitely record their order even in disorder; it was removed by a whole horizon from the contemporary Jacquerie in France, in which the peasants rose like wild beasts, with no ideas but plunder, lust, and revenge. These English rebels resisted manfully at first all temptation to plunder among the rich houses of London. "If they caught any man thieving, they cut off his head, as men who hated thieves above all things"—such is the testimony of their bitter enemy Walsingham. When they gutted John of Gaunt's palace, nothing was kept of the vast wealth which it contained; all things were treated as accursed, like the spoils of Jericho. The rioters were loyal to the King, had a definite policy, and aimed at making treaties in due form with their enemies. They "had among themselves a watchword in English, 'With whome haldes you?" and the answer was, "With Kinge Richarde and the true comons.'" "They took [Chief Justice Belknap] and made him swear on the Bible." At Canterbury "they summoned the Mayor, the bailiffs and the commons of the said town, and examined them whether they would with good will swear to be faithful and loyal to King Richard and to the true commons of England or no." "The commons, out of good feeling to [the King], sent back word by his messengers that they wished to see him and speak with him at Blackheath." At Mile End they were arrayed under "two banners, and many pennons," drew out willingly into two lines at Richard's bidding, and made an orderly bargain with him. In the final meeting at Smithfield, "the king and his train . . . turned into the eastern meadow in front of St. Bartholomew's . . . and the commons arrayed themselves on the west side in great battles." After Tyler's death, again, they followed at Richard's command into Clerkenwell fields, where they

* Walsingham, an. 1381; cf. the record in Powell, "Rising in East Anglia," p. 130. The rioters compelled the constable of the hundred of Hoxne to contribute ten conscripted archers to their party.

were presently surrounded partly by the mercenary troopers of Sir Robert Knolles, but mainly by the citizen levies, "the wards arrayed in bands, a fine company of well-armed folks in great strength." The very suddenness of their collapse is not only perfectly explicable under these circumstances, but it is just what we might expect in a case where the conflicting parties have learnt, under some sort of common discipline, the priceless lesson of give and take, and can see some reason in each other's claims; the Cronstadt Mutiny is the latest example of this, and perhaps not the least instructive.* Their main claims had been granted by the King, and, in proportion as the rioters were loyal and orderly at heart, in the same proportion they must have seen clearly that Wat Tyler's fate had been thoroughly deserved. No wonder that they cowered now before the King and his troops, and dispersed peaceably to their homes. Even Walsingham's satirical account of their arms, with due allowance for literary exaggeration, is exactly what the most formal documents would lead us to expect. "The vilest of commons and peasants," he says; "some of whom had only cudgels, some rusty swords, some only axes, some bows that had hung so long in the smoke as to be browner than ancient ivory, with one arrow apiece, many whereof had but one wing. . . . Among a thousand such, you would scarce have found one man that wore armour."† Compare this with the actual muster-roll of a Norwich leet, a far richer community than these villages from which most of the rebels came (Conesford, A.D. 1355). Out of the 192 mustered, 33 wear defensive armour; 7 only are archers (an unusually small proportion, of

* It must be remembered that the loyal soldiers also had shown in this matter a pusillanimity which contrasted remarkably with their behaviour in the French wars; Walsingham notes this with great astonishment. The quotations are from the "Chronicle of St. Mary's, York," in Oman, Appendix V., pp. 188–200.

† An. 1381; cf. "Eulog. Hist.," iii., 353. The original of both these descriptions seems to be Gower, "Vox Clam." i., 853 ff.

course); 44 turn out with knife, sword, and bill or hatchet; 108 have only two weapons, which in nine out of ten cases consist of knife and cudgel. The rioters, of course, would in most cases have come from this lowest class; and in reading through the Norwich lists one seems to see the very men who followed after John Ball. "Thomas Pottage, with knife and cudgel"; "William Mouse, with knife and cudgel"; "Long John, with knife and cudgel"; "Adam Piper and Robert Skut, with knife and bill"; "John Cosy, Hamo Garlicman, Robert Rubbleyard, John Stutter, Roger Dauber, William Boardcleaver, William Merrygo, Nicholas Skip, Alice Brokedish's Servant,"—all with knife and cudgel again. Gower's mock-heroic catalogue of the rioters' names in the first book of his "Vox Clamantis" is not so picturesque as these actual muster-rolls.

These, then, were the men before whose face Gower describes his fellow-landlords as lurking like wild beasts in the woods, feeding on grass and acorns, and wishing that they could shrink within the very rind of the trees; the men who a day or two later surged like a sea round Chaucer's tower of Aldgate, until some accomplice unbarred the gate. Chroniclers note with astonishment the paralysis of the upper classes all through this revolt, or at least until Wat Tyler's death; and though Richard revoked his Royal promise of freedom, and bloody assizes were held from county to county until the country was sick of slaughter, and Parliament re-enacted all the old oppressive statutes, yet the landlords can never entirely have forgotten this lesson. Professor Oman, in his anxiety to kill the already slain theory that the Revolt virtually put an end to serfdom, seems hardly to allow enough for human nature; but Mr. Trevelyan sums the matter up in words as just as they are eloquent: "[The Revolt] was a sign of national energy, it was a sign of independence and self-respect in the medieval peasants, from whom three-quarters of our race, of all classes and in every continent, are descended.

This independent spirit was not lacking in France in the 14th century, but it died out by the end of the Hundred Years' War; stupid resignation then took hold of burghers and peasantry alike, from the days when Machiavelli observed their torpor, down to the eve of the Revolution. The *ancien régime* was permitted to grow up. But in England there has been a continuous spirit of resistance and independence, so that wherever our countrymen or our kinsmen have gone, they have taken with them the undying tradition of the best and surest freedom, which 'slowly broadens down from precedent to precedent.'" *

This chapter could not be complete without at least a passing allusion to the general uncleanliness of medieval life, even in a city like London, where there was some real attempt at organized scavenging of the streets, and where the laws commanded strictly "he that will keep a pig, let him keep it in his own house." † Four great visitations of the bubonic plague occurred in Chaucer's lifetime; the least of them would have been enough to mark an epoch in modern England. The sixty years of his life are exceptional, on the other hand, in their comparative freedom from severe famine; but there hung always over men's lives the shadow of God's hand—or rather, as they too often felt, of Satan's. During the great storm of 1362 "beasts, trees and housen were all to-smit with violent lightning, and suddenly perished; and the Devil in man's likeness spake to men going by the way"; and a good herald who watched the march past of the rioters in 1381 "saw several Devils among them; he fell sick and died within a brief while afterwards." ‡

It has often been noted how little Chaucer refers

* *L. c.*, p. 255.

† The first general Sanitation Act for England was that of the Parliament held at Cambridge in 1388, and is generally ascribed to the filth of that ancient borough.

‡ "Chronicles of London" (4to., 1827), p. 65. "Eulog. Hist." iii., 353.

either to this Revolt or the Great Pestilence; but the multitude interested him comparatively little. He felt with the pleasures and pains of the individual poor man; but with regard to the poor in bulk, he would only have shrugged his shoulders and said "they are always with us." His Griselda is own sister to King Cophetua's beggar-maid in the Burne-Jones picture. For all the real pathos of the story, her rags are draped with every refinement of consummate art. We believe in them conventionally, but know on reflection that they are there only to point an artistic contrast. Again, in the "Nuns' Priest's Tale" the "poure wydwe, somdel stope in age," with her smoky cottage and the humble stock of her yard, are just the subdued and tender background which the poet needs for the mock-chivalric glories of his Chanticleer and Partlet. For glimpses of the real poor, the poor poor, we must go to "Piers Plowman." Here we find them of all sorts, and at the top of the scale the Plowman, the skilled agricultural labourer or almost peasant-farmer—

"I have no penny, quoth Piers, pullets for to buy,
Neither goose nor griskin; but two green cheeses [new
A few curds and cream, and a cake of oats,
And bread for my bairns of beans and of peases.
And yet I say, by my soul, I have no salt bacon;
Not a cockney, by Christ, collops to make. [egg: eggs and bacon
But I have leek-plants, parsley and shallots,
Chiboles and chervils and cherries, half-red . . . [onions
By this livelihood we must live till Lammas-time,
And by that I hope to have harvest in my croft,
Then may I dight my dinner as me dearly liketh."

Piers speaks here of a bad year; but even his modest comfort required hard work of all kinds and in all weathers. As the Ploughman says in another place—

"I have been Truth's servant all this fifty winter,
Both y-sowen his seed and sued his beasts,
Within and withouten waited his profits.
I dike and I delve, I do what Truth biddeth;

THE PLOUGHMAN

FROM THE LOUTERELL PSALTER (EARLY 14TH CENTURY)

Some time I sow and some time I thresh,
In tailor's craft and tinker's craft, what Truth can devise,
I weave and I wind, and do what Truth biddeth." *

In contrast with Piers stands the great crowd of beggars—soldiers discharged from the wars, and sturdy vagrants who fear nothing but labour—"beggars with bags, which brewhouses be their churches," as the poet writes in the racy style affected in modern times by Mrs. Gamp. The roads were crowded with wandering minstrels "that will neither swink nor sweat, but swear great oaths, and find up foul fantasies, and fools them maken; and yet have wit at will to work, if they would." Lowest of all (except the outlaws and felons who haunt the thickets and forests) come the professional tramps—

"For they live in no love, nor no law they holden,
They wed no woman wherewith they dealen,
Bring forth bastards, beggars of kind.
Or the back or some bone they breaken of their children,
And go feigning with their infants for evermore after.
There are more misshapen men among such beggars
Than of many other men that on this mould walken."

But the Great Pestilence had bred yet another class odious to Piers Plowman—strikers, as they would be called in modern English—the men who thought their labour was worth more than the miserable price at which Parliament was constantly trying to fix it under the heaviest penalties. These were they of whom the Commons complained in 1376 that "they contrive by great malice prepense to evade the penalty of the aforesaid Ordinances and Statutes; for so soon as their masters chide them for evil service, or would fain pay them for their aforesaid service according to the form of the said Statutes, suddenly they flee and disperse away from their service and from their own district, from county to county, from hundred to

* C., ix., 304; B., v., 549. It will be noted how nearly this diet accords with that of the widow and her daughter in Chaucer's "Nuns' Priest's Tale"; cf. Langlois, "La Vie en France au M-A.," p. 122.

hundred, from town to town, into strange places unknown to their said masters, who know not where to find them. . . . And the greater part of such runaway labourers become commonly stout thieves, wherefrom robberies and felonies increase everywhere from day to day, to the destruction of the aforesaid realm."* The worst effect of a law which attempted to fix wages everywhere and chain the labourer to one master or one parish, was to drive into rebellion indiscriminately the honest man who wanted to sell his work in an open market, and the idler who was glad to escape in company with his betters. No doubt there was a half-truth in the satire on the pretensions of these labourers for whom the old wages no longer sufficed, and who, in spite of the law, often managed to enforce their claim—

> "Labourers that have no land to live on, but their hands,
> Deigned not to dine to-day on last night's cabbage;
> May no penny-ale please them, nor a piece of bacon,
> But it be fresh flesh or fish, fried or y-baken,
> And that *chaud* and *plus chaud* for the chill of their maw."

But sometimes the law too had its way; and for years before the Great Revolt the countryside swarmed with such Statute-made malefactors, together with those other outcasts so graphically described in Jusserand's "Vie Nomade" (Pt. II., c. 2).

Meanwhile there lived and died, in the background, the thousands who, for all their honest toil, struggled on daily from hand to mouth, knowing no Bible truth more true than this, that God had cursed the ground for Adam's sake. These are the true poor—"God's minstrels," as they are called in "Piers Plowman"; those upon whom our alms cannot possibly be ill-spent—

> "The most needy are our neighbours, an we take good heed,
> As prisoners in pits and poor folk in cotes
> Charged with children and chief lordës rent;

* "Rot. Parl." ii., 340. † *L. c.*, C., ix., 331.

That they with spinning may spare, spend they it in house-hire,
Both in milk and in meal to make therewith papelots
To glut therewith their children that cry after food.
Also themselves suffer much hunger,
And woe in wintertime, with waking a-nights
To rise to the ruel to rock the cradle . . .
Both to card and to comb, to clout and to wash
To rub and to reel, and rushes to peel,
That ruth is to read, or in rime to show
The woe of these women that woneth in cotes ;
And many other men that much woe suffren,
Both a-hungered and athirst, to turn the fair side outward,
And be abashëd for to beg, and will not be a-known
What them needeth to their neighbours at noon and at even.
This I wot witterly, as the world teacheth,
What other men behoveth that have many children
And have no chattels but their craft to clothe them and to feed
And fele to fong thereto, and few pence taken.
There is payn and penny-ale as for a pittance y-taken,
Cold flesh and cold fish for venison y-baken ;
Fridays and fasting-days, a farthing's worth of mussels
Were a feast for such folk, or so many cockles."*

How many such cottages did Chaucer, like ourselves, pass on his ride to Canterbury? In all ages the sufferings of the very poor have been limited only by the bounds of that which flesh and blood can endure.

* *L. c.*, C., x., 71 ff. "Papelots" = porridge; "ruel" = bedside; "woneth" = dwell; "witterly" = surely; "and fele to fong," etc. = "and many [children] to clutch at the few pence they earn; under those circumstances, bread and small beer is held an unusual luxury." "Pittance" is a monastic word, meaning extra food beyond the daily fare.

CHAPTER XXI

MERRY ENGLAND

"In the holidays all the summer the youths are exercised in leaping dancing, shooting, wrestling, casting the stone, and practising their shields; the maidens trip in their timbrels, and dance as long as they can well see. In winter, every holiday before dinner, the boars prepared for brawn are set to fight, or else bulls and bears are baited. When the great fen, or moor, which watereth the walls of the city on the north side, is frozen, many young men play upon the ice; some, striding as wide as they may, do slide swiftly; others make themselves seats of ice, as great as millstones; one sits down, many hand in hand to draw him, and one slipping on a sudden, all fall together; some tie bones to their feet and under their heels; and shoving themselves by a little piked staff, do slide as swiftly as a bird flieth in the air, or an arrow out of a cross-bow. Sometime two run together with poles, and hitting one the other, either one or both do fall, not without hurt; some break their arms, some their legs, but youth desirous of glory in this sort exerciseth itself against the time of war."—FITZSTEPHEN'S "Description of London," translated by John Stow.

WHERE in the meantime was Merry England? In the sense in which the phrase is often used, as a mere political or social catchword, it lay for Chaucer, as for us, in the haze of an imaginary past. Englishmen were even then more fortunate in their lot than many continental nations; but they had already serious responsibilities to bear. The glory of that age lies less in thoughtless merrymaking than in a brave and steady struggle—with the elements, with circumstances, and with fellow-man. Even in Chaucer's time Englishmen took their pleasures sadly in comparison with Frenchmen and Italians. We cannot say that our forefathers enjoyed life less than we do, but we can certainly say that theirs was a life which we could enjoy only after a process of acclimatization; and they lacked almost

altogether one of the most valued privileges of modern civilization—the undisturbed conduct of our own little house and our own small affairs, the established peace and order under cover of which even an artisan may now pursue his own hobbies with a sense of personal independence and a tranquil certitude of the morrow for which Roger Bacon would cheerfully have sacrificed a hand or an eye. Such tranquillity might conceivably be bought at the price of nobler virtues, but it is in itself one of the most justly prized conquests of civilization, and we may seek it vainly in our past.

However, as life was undoubtedly more picturesque in the 14th century, so the enjoyment also was more on the surface. Fitzstephen's brief catalogue of the Londoners' relaxations is charming; and, even when we have made all allowance for the poetical colours lavished by an antiquary who saw everything through a haze of distant memory and regret, Stow's descriptions of city merrymakings are among the most delightful pages of history. Hours of labour were long,* and for village folk there was no great choice of amusements; yet there is a whole world of delight to be found in the most elementary field sports. Moreover, the most expansive enjoyment is often natural to those who have otherwise least freedom; witness the bank-holiday excitement of our own days and the negro passion for song and dance. The holy-days on which the Church forbade work amounted to something like one a week; and though there are frequent complaints that these were ill kept, equally widespread and emphatic is the testimony to noisy merriment on them; they bred more drunkenness and crime, we are assured by anxious

* An Act of 1495 provided that "from the middle of March to the middle of September work was to go on from 5 a.m. till between 7 and 8 p.m., with half an hour for breakfast, and an hour and a half for dinner and for the midday sleep. In winter work was to be during daylight. These legal ordinances were not perhaps always kept, but they at least show the standard at which employers aimed" ("Social England," vol. ii., chap. vii.).

Churchmen, than all the rest of the year.* Indeed, it is from judicial records that we may glean by far the fullest details about the games of our ancestors; and a brilliant archivist like Siméon Luce, when he undertakes to give a picture of popular games in the France of Chaucer's day, draws almost exclusively on Royal proclamations and court rolls.†

From the Universities, sacred haunts of modern athleticism, down to the smallest country parish, we get the same picture of sports flourishing under considerable discouragement from the powers in being, but flourishing all the same, and taking a still more boisterous tinge from the injudicious attempts to suppress them altogether. "Alike in the Universities and out of them," writes Dr. Rashdall on the subject of games, "the asceticism of the medieval ideal provoked and fostered the wildest indulgence in actual life." Even chess was among the "noxious, inordinate, and unhonest games" expressly forbidden to the scholars of New College by William of Wykeham's Statutes,‡ and indeed throughout the Middle Ages this was a pastime which led to more gambling and quarrels than most others. A very curious quarrel at cudgel-play outside the walls of Oxford is recorded in the "Munimenta Academica" (Rolls Series, p. 526). At Cambridge it was forbidden under penalty of forty pence to play tennis in the town. At Oxford we find four citizens compelled to abjure the same game solemnly before the vice-chancellor; and readers both of Froissart and of the preface to "Ivanhoe" will remember violent feuds arising from it.§ In 1446

* Bishop Grosseteste asserted that honest labour on holy days would be far less sinful than the sports which often took their place. "Epp." (R.S.), p. 74.

† "La France pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans" (1890), 95 ff. The essay describes a state of things very similar to what we may gather from English records.

‡ "Universities of Europe," ii., 669 ff.

§ Cooper, "Annals of Cambridge," an. 1410; "Munim. Acad." (R.S.), 602; Riley, 571; Strutt (1898), p. 49.

the Bishop of Exeter, while pleading that he has always kept open the doors of the cathedral cloisters at all reasonable times, adds, "at which times, and in especial in time of divine service, ungodly-ruled people (most customably young people of the said Commonalty) within the said cloister have exercised unlawful games, as the top, queke, penny-prick, and most at tennis, by the which all the walls of the said cloister have been defouled and the glass windows all to-burst." *

As early as 1314, the laws of London forbade playing at football in the fields near the city; and this was among the games which, by Royal proclamation of 1363, were to give place to the all-important sport of archery. Others forbidden at the same time were quoits, throwing the hammer, hand-ball, club-ball, and golf. Indeed, from this ancient and royal game down to leap-frog and "conquerors," nearly all our present sports were familiar, in more or less developed forms, to our ancestors. In 1332, Edward III. had to proclaim "let no boy or other person, under pain of imprisonment, play in any part of Westminster Palace, during the Parliament now summoned, at bars [*i.e.* prisoners' base] or other games, or at snatch-hood"; and John Myrc instructs the parish clergy to forbid to their parishioners in general all "casting of ax-tree and eke of stone . . . ball and bars and suchlike play" in the churchyard.† Wrestling, again, was among the most popular sports, and one of those which gave most trouble to coroners. The two great wrestling matches in 1222 between the citizens of London and the suburbans ended in a riot which assumed almost the dignity of a rebellion. Fatal wrestling-bouts, like fatal games of chess, are among the stock incidents of medieval romance; whether the enemy was to be got rid of through the hands of a professional champion (as

* "Shillingford Letters," p. 101. *Queke* was probably a kind of hop-scotch, and *penny-prick* a tossing game; both enioyed an evil repute, according to Strutt.

† "Rot. Parl." ii., 64; Myrc., E.E.T.S., i., 334.

in the quasi-Chaucerian "Tale of Gamelyn") or by such foul play as is described in the Pardoner's Tale—

> Arise, as though thou wouldest with him play,
> And I shall rive him through the sidës way,
> While that thou strugglest with him as in game;
> And with thy dagger look thou do the same.

Moreover, the same tragedy might only too easily be played unintentionally, as in the ballad of the "Two Brothers"—

> They warsled up, they warsled down
> Till John fell to the ground;
> A dirk fell out of Willie's pouch,
> And gave him a deadly wound.

Or, as it is recorded in the business-like prose of an assize-roll: "Richard of Horsley was playing and wrestling with John the Miller of Tutlington; and by mishap his knife fell from its sheath and wounded the aforesaid John without the aforesaid Richard's knowledge, so that he died. And the aforesaid Richard fled and is not suspected of the death; let him therefore return if he will, but let his chattels be confiscated for his flight. (N.B. He has no chattels)." * In this same assize-roll, out of forty-three accidental deaths, three were due to village games, and three more to sticks or stones aimed respectively at a cock, a dog, and a pig, but finding their fatal billet in a human life. Ecclesiastical disciplinarians endeavoured frequently, but with indifferent success, to put down the practice of wrestling in churchyards, with the scarcely less turbulent miracle-plays or dances, and the markets which so frequently stained the holy ground with blood. Even the State interfered in the matter of churchyard fairs and markets "for the honour of Holy Church"; but they went on

* "Northumberland Assize Rolls," p. 323. There is another fatal wrestling-bout in the same roll (p. 348), another in the similar Norfolk roll analysed by Mr. Walter Rye in the *Archæological Review* (1888), and another exactly answering to John and Willie's case in Prof. Maitland's "Crown Pleas for the County of Gloucester," No. 452.

gaily as before. Dances, as I have already had occasion to note, were condemned with a violence which is only partially explained even by Chaucer's illuminating lines about the Parish Clerk—

> In twenty manners could he skip and dance,
> (After the School of Oxenfordë, though,)
> And with his leggës casten to and fro.*

To quote here again from Dr. Rashdall, "William of Wykeham found it necessary for the protection of the sculpture in the Chapel reredos to make a Statute against dancing or jumping in the Chapel or adjoining Hall. His language is suggestive of that untranslatable amusement now known as 'ragging,' which has no doubt formed a large part of the relaxation of students—at least of English students—in all ages. At the same College there is a comprehensive prohibition of all 'struggling, chorus-singing, dancing, leaping, singing, shouting, tumult and inordinate noise, pouring forth of water, beer, and all other liquids and tumultuous games' in the Hall, on the ground that they were likely to disturb the occupants of the Chaplain's chamber below. A moderate indulgence in some of the more harmless of these pastimes in other places seems to be permitted."†

In this, the good bishop was only following the very necessary precedent of many prelates before him. As early as 1223, when the reform of the friars had stimulated a great effort to put down old abuses throughout the Church, Bishop Poore of Salisbury and his diocesan council decreed "we forbid the holding of dances, or base and unhonest games which provoke to lasciviousness, in the churchyard. . . . We forbid the proclaiming of scot-ales in church by layfolk, or by priests or clerks

* "C. T.," A., 3328. Etienne de Bourbon has no doubt that "the Devil invented dancing, and is governor and procurator of dancers"; and he explains the popular proverb, that God's thunderbolt falls oftener on the church than on the tavern, by the notorious profanations to which churches were subjected. ("Anecdotes," pp. 269, 397.)

† *L. c.* ii., 672.

either in or without the church." Similar prohibitions are repeated by later councils with an emphasis which only shows their inefficiency. The University of Oxford complained to Henry V. in 1414 that fairs and markets were held "more frequently than ever" on consecrated ground; and the Visitation of 1519 among churches appropriated to York Cathedral elicited the fact that football and similar games were carried on in two of the churchyards. These holy places sometimes witnessed rougher sports still; especially cathedral cemeteries during the great processions of the ecclesiastical year. "Moreover," writes Bishop Grosseteste in a circular letter to all his archdeacons, "cause it to be proclaimed strictly in every church that, when the parishes come in procession for the yearly visitation and homage to the Cathedral church, no parish shall struggle to press before another parish with its banners; since from this source not only quarrels are wont to spring, but cruel bloodshed." Bishop Giffard of Worcester was compelled for the same reason to proclaim in every church of his diocese "that no one shall join in the Pentecostal processions with a sword or other kind of arms"; and a similar prohibition in the diocese of Ely (1364) is based on the complaint that "both fights and deaths are wont to result therefrom." Even more were the minds of the best clergy exercised by the corpse-wakes in churches, which "turned the house of mourning and prayer into a house of laughter and excess"; and again by "the execrable custom of keeping the 'Feast of Fools,' which obtains in some churches," and which "profanes the sacred anniversary of the Lord's Circumcision with the filth of lustful pleasures"; yet here again the tenacity of popular custom baffled even the most vigorous prelates.*

We must not pass away from popular amusements without one glance at these above-mentioned scot-ales,

* Wilkins, "Concilia," i., 600; iii., 61, 68, 365; "York Fabric Rolls," 269 ff; Grosseteste, "Epp." (R.S.), pp. 75, 118, 161; Giffard's "Register" (Worcester), p. 422; and Cutts, "Parish Priests," p. 122.

which were probably relics of the Anglo-Saxon semi-religious drinking-bouts. In the later Middle Ages they appear as forerunners of the modern bazaar or religious tea; a highly successful device for raising money contributions by an appeal to the convivial instincts of a whole parish or district. In the early 13th century we find them denounced among the methods employed by sheriffs for illegal extortion; and about the same time they were very frequently condemned from the religious point of view. The clergy were not only forbidden to be present at such functions, but also directed to warn their parishioners diligently against them, "for the health of their souls and bodies," since all who took part at such feasts were excommunicated. But the custom died hard; or rather, it was probably rebaptized, like so many other relics of paganism; and the change seems to have taken place during Chaucer's lifetime. In 1364 Bishop Langham of Ely was still fulminating against scot-ales; in 1419, if not before, we find an authorized system of "church-ales" in aid of the fabric. These were held sometimes in the sacred edifice itself; more often in the Church Houses, the rapid multiplication of which during the 15th century is probably due to the equally rapid growth of church-ales. The puritanism of the 13th century was by this time somewhat out of fashion; parish finances had come far more under the parishioners' own control; and it was obviously convenient to make the best of these time-honoured compotations, as of the equally rough-and-ready hock-day customs, in order to meet expenses for which the parish was legally responsible. Earnest Churchmen had, all through this century, more important abuses to combat than these quasi-religious convivialities; and we find no voice raised against church-ales until the new puritanism of the Reformation. The Canons of 1603 forbade, among other abuses, "church ale drinkings . . . in the church, chapel, or churchyard." While Bishop Piers of Bath and Wells testified that he

saw no harm in them, the puritan Stubbes accused the participants of becoming "as drunk as rats, and as blockish as brute beasts." No doubt the truth lies between these extremes; but church-ales must not be altogether forgotten when we read the numerous medieval testimonies to the intimate connection between holy days and crime.*

Perhaps the most widespread and most natural of all country sports was that of poaching. As Dr. Rashdall has pointed out, it was especially popular at the two Universities, where the paucity of authorized amusements drove the students into wilder extremes. We have also abundant records of clerical poachers; and in 1389 Richard II. enacted at the petition of the Commons "that no priest or clerk with less than ten pounds of yearly income should keep greyhounds, 'leetes' or other hunting dogs, nor ferrets, nets, or snares." The same petition complained that "artificers and labourers —that is to say, butchers, cobblers, tailors, and other working-folk, keep greyhounds and other dogs; and at the time when good Christians are at church on holy-days, hearing their divine services, these go hunting in the parks, coney-covers, and warrens pertaining to lords and other folk, and destroy them utterly." It was therefore enacted that no man with an income of less than forty shillings should presume to keep hunting dogs or implements.

But in spite of squires and church synods, the working-man did all he could to escape, in his own untutored fashion, from the dullness of his working days. Every turn of life, from the cradle to the grave, was seized upon as an excuse for rough-and-ready sports. When a witness wishes to give a reason for remembering a christening on a certain day, he testifies to having broken his leg in the baptismal football match. Bishops struggled against the practice of celebrating

* Wilkins, i., 530, 719; iii., 61 and *passim; Archæological Journal*, vol. xl., pp. 1 ff; "Somerset Record Society," vol. iv.

marriages in taverns, lest the intending bride and bridegroom should plight their troth in liquor; and weddings in general were so uproarious as to be sometimes ruled out as too improper not only for a monk's attendance but even for that of serious and pious layfolk. Similar survivals of barbaric sports clung to the funeral ceremonies—the *wakë-pleyes* of Chaucer's Knight's Tale; and Archbishop Thoresby's constitutions of 1367 seem to speak of wrestling matches held even in the church by the side of the dead man's bier. Such things could scarcely have happened without some clerical connivance; and in fact, the sporting parson was as common in Chaucer's as in Fielding's day. The hunting Monk of his "Prologue" is abundantly vouched for by the despairing complaints of ecclesiastical disciplinarians; and the parish parson, so often a peasant by birth, constantly set at naught the prohibitions of his superiors, to join with tenfold zest in the least decorous pastimes of his village flock. While archbishops in council legislated repeatedly and vainly against the hunting and tavern-haunting priest, swaggering about with a sword at his side or the least decent of lay doublets and hosen on his limbs, the homely Lollard satirist vented his scorn on this Parson Trulliber, who contrasted so startlingly with Chaucer's Parson Adams—

> For the tithing of a duck
> Or of an apple, or of an ey [egg
> They make man swear upon a book;
> Thus they foulen Christës fay. [faith
> Such bearen evilly heaven's key;
> They may assoil, and they may shrive,
> With mennës wivës strongly play,
> With truë tillers sturt and strive [struggle
>
> At the wrestling, and at the wake,
> And chiefë chanters at the ale;
> Market-beaters, and meddling-make,
> Hopping and hooting with heave and hale.
> At fairë fresh, and at wine stale;
> Dine, and drink, and make debate;
> The seven sacraments set a-sale;
> How keep such the keys of heaven gate?
> ("Political Poems" (R.S.), i., 330).

CHAPTER XXII

THE KING'S PEACE

"Accident plays a greater part in the fourteenth century than perhaps at any other epoch. . . . At bottom society was neither quite calm nor quite settled, and many of its members were still half savage."—JUSSERAND, "English Wayfaring Life."

THE key to these contrasts, and much else that we are slow to imagine in medieval life, lies in the comparative simplicity of that earlier civilization. We must indeed beware of exaggerating this simplicity; there were already many complex threads of social development; again, the subtle tyranny of custom and opinion has in all primitive societies a power which we find it hard to realize. But certainly work and play were far less specialized in Chaucer's day than in ours; far less definitely sorted into different pigeon-holes of life. The drinking-bouts and rough games which scandalized the reformers of the 13th century had once been religious ceremonies themselves; and the two ideas were still confused in the popular mind. If, again, Justice was so anxious to forbid popular sports, this was partly because some of her own proceedings still smacked strongly of the primeval sporting instinct for which her growing dignity now began to blush. The scenic penances of the pillory and cucking-stool were among the most popular spectacles in every town; and a trial by battle "till the stars began to appear" must often have been a better show than a tournament, even without such further excitement as would be afforded by the match between a woman and a one-armed friar, or the searching of a bishop's champion for the contraband prayers and incantations sewn under his

clothes, or the miracle by which a defeated combatant, who was supposed to have been blinded and emasculated in due course of justice, was found afterwards to be perfectly whole again by saintly intercession. Still more exciting were the hue and cry after a felon, his escape to some sanctuary, and his final race for life or "abjuration of the realm." What vivid recollections there must have been in Chaucer's family, for instance, of his great-uncle's death under circumstances which are thus drily recorded by the coroner (November 12, 1336): "The Jurors say that Simon Chaucer and one Robert de Upton, skinner, . . . after dinner, quarrelled with one another in the high street opposite to the shop of the said Robert, in the said parish, by reason of rancour previously had between them, whereupon Simon wounded Robert on the upper lip; which John de Upton, son of Robert, perceiving, he took up a 'dorbarre,' without the consent of his father, and struck Simon on the left hand and side, and on the head, and then fled into the church of St. Mary of Aldermarichirche; and in the night following he secretly escaped from the same. He had no chattels. Simon lived, languishing, till the said Tuesday, when he died of the blows, early in the morning. . . . The Sheriffs are ordered to attach the said John when he can be found in their bailiwick, . . ." There was an evident sporting element in this race for sanctuary, and the subsequent secret escape; and we cannot help feeling some sympathy with the son whose dorbarre had intervened so unwisely, yet so well. But this affair, except for its Chaucerian interest, is commonplace; to realize the true humours of criminal justice one needs to read through a few pages of the records published by the Surtees Society, Professors Maitland and Thorold Rogers, Dr. Gross, and Mr. Walter Rye. We may there find how Seman the hermit was robbed, beaten, and left for dead by Gilbert of Niddesdale; how Gilbert unluckily fell next day into the hands of the King's

serjeant, and the hermit had still strength enough to behead his adversary in due form of law, the Northumberland custom being that a victim could redeem his stolen goods only by doing the executioner's dirty work; how, again, Thomas the Reeve wished to chastise his concubine with a cudgel, but casually struck and killed the child in her arms, and the jury brought it in a mere accident; how an unknown woman came and bewitched John of Kerneslaw in his own house one evening, so that the said John used to make the sign of the cross over his loins when any man said *Benedicite;* how in a fit of fury he thrust the witch through with a spear, and her corpse was solemnly burned, while he was held to have done the deed "in self-defence, as against the Devil;" or, again, how Hugh Maidenlove escaped from Norwich Castle with his fellow sheep-stealer William the Clerk, and carried him stealthily on his back to the sanctuary of St. John in Berstreet, by reason that the said William's feet were so putrefied by the duress of the prison that he could not walk.* Let us take in full, as throwing a more intimate light on law and police, another case with a different beginning and a different ending to Simon Chaucer's (November 6, 1311). "It came to pass at Yelvertoft . . . that a certain William of Wellington, parish chaplain of Yelvertoft, sent John his parish clerk to John Cobbler's house to buy candles, namely a pennyworth. But the same John would not send them without the money; wherefore the aforesaid William waxed wroth, took a stick, and went to the house of the said John and broke in the door upon him and smote this John on the fore part of the head with the same stick, so that his brains gushed forth and he died forthwith. And [William] fled hastily

* Eight men died in Northampton gaol between Aug. 1322 and Nov. 1323 (Gross, p. 79). The jury casually record: "He died of hunger, thirst, and want." . . . "Want of food and drink, and cold." . . . "Natural death." . . . "Hunger and thirst and natural death." One is really glad to think that so small a proportion of criminals ever found their way into prison.

to the Church of Yelvertoft. . . . Inquest was made before J. of Buckingham by four neighbouring townships, to wit, Yelverton, Crick, Winwick and Lilbourne. They say on their oath as aforesaid, that they know no man guilty of John's death save the said William of Wellington. He therefore came before the aforesaid coroner and confessed that he had slain the said John; wherefore he abjured the realm of England in the presence of the said four townships brought together [for this purpose]. And the port of Dover was assigned to him." *

This "abjuration of the realm," a custom of English growth, which our kings transplanted also into Normandy, was one of the most picturesque scenes of medieval life. It was designed to obviate some of the abuses of that privilege of sanctuary which had no doubt its real uses in those days of club-law. What happened in fact to William of Wellington, we may gather not only from legal theorists of the Middle Ages, but from the number of actual cases collected by Réville.† The criminal remained at bay in the church; and no man might as yet hinder John his clerk from bringing him food, drink, or any other necessary. The coroner came as soon as he could, generally within three or four days at longest; but he might possibly be detained for ten days or more, and meanwhile (to quote from an actual case in 1348) "the parish kept watch over him . . . and the coroner found the aforesaid William in the said church, and asked him wherefore he was there, and whether or not he would yield himself to the King's peace." The matter was too plain for William to deny; his confession was duly registered, and he took his oath to quit the realm within forty days.‡ Coming to the gate of the church or churchyard, he

* Gross, "Office of Coroner," p. 69.

† "Eng. Hist. Rev.," vol. 50.

‡ This still allowed him to migrate to another part of the King's dominions—*e.g.* Ireland, Scotland, Normandy.

swore solemnly before the assembled crowd: "Oyez oyez, oyez! Coroner and other good folk: I, William de Wellington, for the crime of manslaughter which I have committed, will quit this land of England nevermore to return, except by leave of the kings of England or their heirs: so help me God and His saints!" The coroner then assigned him a port, and a reasonable time for the journey; from Yelverton it would have been about a week. His bearing during this week was minutely prescribed: never to stray from the high-road, or spend two nights in the same place; to make straight for his port, and to embark without delay. If at Dover he found no vessel ready to sail, then he was bound daily to walk into the sea up to his knees—or, according to stricter authorities, up to his neck—and to take his rest only on the shore, in proof that he was ready in spirit to leave the land which by his crimes he had forfeited. His dress meanwhile was that of a felon condemned to death—a long, loose white tunic, bare feet, and a wooden cross in his hand to mark that he was under protection of Holy Church.

Such abjurations were matters of common occurrence, yet Dover beach was not crowded with these unwilling pilgrims. A few, of course, were overtaken and slain on the way, in spite of their sacred character, by the friends of the murdered man. But many more must have reflected that, since they would find neither friends nor welcome abroad, there was less risk in taking their chance as runaways at home. If caught, they were liable to be strung up out of hand; but how many chances there must have been in the fugitive's favour! and, even in the last resort, some plausible excuse might possibly soften the captors' hearts. One criminal, who might possibly even have rubbed shoulders with Chaucer in London, pleaded that he had taken sanctuary and been torn from the altar. This was disproved, and he took refuge in a convenient dumbness. For such afflictions the Middle Ages knew a sovereign remedy, and he was

led forthwith to the gallows. Here he found his tongue again, and pleaded clergy; but he failed to read his neck-verse, and was hanged. Often the miserable home-sick wanderers came back and tried to save their lives by turning approvers against fellow-criminals. In 1330 Parliament had to interfere, and ruled that John English [*Lengleyse*], who three years before had slain the Mayor of Lynn, taken sanctuary, and abjured the realm, could not now be suffered to purchase his own pardon by accusing others.

What happened, it may be asked, if William refused either to acknowledge his guilt or to stand his trial, and simply clung to the sanctuary? At least half the criminals thus refused; and here even theory was uncertain. If, at the end of his forty days of grace, the lay authorities tore him from the altar, then they were pretty sure of excommunication from the bishop. The lawyers held, therefore, that it was for the Ordinary, the Archdeacon, the Parson, to expel this man who had outstayed even the ecclesiastical welcome; but we all know the risk of dragging even a good-tempered dog from under a chair where he has taken refuge; and how could the poor bishop be expected to deal with this desperado? The matter was thus, like so many others, left very much to chance. The village did its best to starve the man out, and meanwhile to watch him night and day. One offending William, whose forty days had expired on August 12, 1374, held out against this blockade until September 9, when he fled. Then there was a hue and cry of the whole village; he might indeed run the gauntlet and make good his escape, leaving his quondam neighbours to prove before the justices that they had done all they could, or to pay a fine for their negligence. Often, however, a stick or stone would bring him down at close quarters, or an arrow from afar; then in a moment he was overpowered and beheaded, and that chase was remembered for years as the greatest event in Yelvertoft.

There was indeed one gross irregularity in the case

of Sir William de Wellington, but an irregularity which modern readers will readily pardon. Becket had given his life for the freedom of the Church as he conceived it, and especially for the principle that no cleric should be punished by the lay courts for any offence, however heinous. The death of "the holy blissful martyr" did indeed establish this principle in theory; and, with the most powerful corporation in the world to protect it, it was, in fact, kept far more strictly than most legal theories. William, therefore, after dashing John the Cobbler's brains upon the floor, might well have found it necessary to take refuge in the church from the blind fury of summary and illegal vengeance; but he need not have abjured the realm. In theory he had simply to confess his offence, or to stand his trial and suffer conviction from the King's judges; then the bishop's commissary stepped forward and claimed the condemned clerk in the name of the Church. The bishop, disregarding the verdict of the jury, would try him again by the primitive process of compurgation; that is, would bid him present himself with a specified number of fellow-clergy or persons of repute, who would join William in swearing on the Bible to his innocence. In this particular case William would probably have failed to find proper compurgators, and the bishop might, if he had chosen, have imprisoned him for life. But this involved very considerable expense and responsibility; it was a more invidious and costly matter than to prosecute nowadays for alleged illegal practices, and the documents show us very clearly that only the smallest fraction of these criminous clerks were imprisoned for any length of time. Indeed, for any such strict system, the episcopal prisons would have needed to be ten times their actual size. Equally seldom do we find notices of the next drastic punishment in the bishop's power—the total degradation of the offender from his Orders, after which the lay judges might punish him unchallenged for his second crime. Many of the guilty parties did,

in fact, "purge" themselves successfully, and were thus let loose on society as before; this we have on the unimpeachable testimony of the Oxford Chancellor Gascoigne, even if it were not sufficiently evident from the records themselves. The notoriously guilty received more or less inadequate punishments, and were sometimes simply shunted on to another diocese, a shifting of responsibility which was practised even by the strictest of reforming prelates. The curious reader may trace for himself, in the English summaries from Bishop Giffard's register, the practical working of these clerical privileges.* First, there are frequent records of criminous clerks handed over to the bishop, in the ordinary routine, by the lay justices. Sometimes the bishop had to interfere in a more summary fashion, as when he commissioned four rural deans "to cause Robert, rector of the Church of the Blessed Mary in the market of Bristol, to be released, he being suspected of homicide having fled to the church, and having been besieged here; and to excommunicate all who should oppose them" (49). Robert had not yet gone through any formal trial; the bishop apparently rescued him merely from the fury of the people; but, even if he had been tried and condemned by the King's courts, he had still a liberal chance of escape. A few pages further in the register (79) we find a declaration "that whereas William de Capella, an acolyte, was accused and condemned for the death of John Gogun of Pershore, before the justices itinerant at Worcester, and was on demand of the bishop's commissary delivered up by the same justices, the same William being afterwards examined before the sub-prior of Worcester and Geoffrey de Cubberlay, clerk, solemnly declared that he was in nowise guilty; and at length upon proclamations, no one opposing, with four priests, two sub-deacons, and six acolytes, his compurgators, he was admitted to purgation and declared innocent of the said crime; and

* Worcestershire Record Society.

after giving security to answer any accusers if required, he was permitted to depart freely. And it is forbidden under pain of anathema to any one to lay such homicide to the charge of the said William." Sometimes, however, the scandal was too notorious; and, though no mere layman had the least legal right to interfere with the bishop's own private justice, the King would apply pressure in the name of common sense. So on page 408 we find a "letter from King Edward I. to John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury, desiring him to refuse purgation to Robert de Lawarre, a clerk accused of theft and homicide and in the gaol of Worcester;" and a few months later the same strenuous champion of justice sent a more general warning to the Bishop of Worcester, "forbidding him to take the purgation of clerks detained in his prison, whose crimes are notorious; but with regard to others he may take such purgation" (410). The system was, indeed, notoriously faulty, and did much to encourage that venality in the clerical courts which moved Chaucer's laughter and the indignation of his contemporaries. The clergy, says Gower, are judges in their own cause, and each shields the other: "My turn to-day; to-morrow thou shalt do the like for me." In vain did councils decree year after year that they should bear no arms; rectors (as we have seen in Chapter VIII.) imperturbably bequeathed their formidable daggers by will, and duly registered the bequest in the Bishop's court. "O Priest, answer to my call; wherefore hast thou so long a knife dangling at thy belt? art thou armed to fight in God's quarrel or the devil's? . . . The wild beast in rutting-season becomes fiercer and more wanton; if ever he be thwarted, forthwith he will fight and strike; and that is the same cause why the priests fight when they turn to lechery like beasts; they wander idly everywhere seeking and hunting for women, with whom they corrupt the country."* A century later the Commons

* Gower, "Mirour," 20125, 20653.

pressed the King for fresh and more stringent laws to remedy the notorious fact that "upon trust of the privilege of the Church, divers persons have been the more bold to commit murder, rape, robbery, theft, and other mischievous deeds, because they have been continually admitted to the benefit of the clergy as often as they did offend in any of the [aforesaid]."

This petition of the Commons and the Act which resulted from it, had already often been anticipated by the rough-and-ready justice of the people themselves. In 1382, the citizens of London took these matters into their own hands, and Chaucer had probably seen more than one unchaste priest marched with his guilty partner to the common lock-up in Cornhill, to the accompaniment of derisive music, and amid the jeers of the populace. Eight years after his death, the city authorities began to keep a regular record of such cases, and "Letter-Book," I, "contains some dozens of similar charges, mostly against chaplains celebrating in the city, temp. Henry IV. to Henry VI."* This lynch-law is abundantly explained by the very disproportionate numbers of criminous clerks whom we often find recorded in coroners' or assize rolls, and who were frequently no mere shavelings, but priests and substantial incumbents.† In 1200 these men were almost above the law; in 1600 they were amenable to justice as though they had not been anointed with oil; in 1400 it depended (as in London and in this Yelvertoft case) whether the popular indignation was strong enough to beat down the clerical privilege.

"Accident plays a more important part in the 14th century than in any other age," and in many ways England was no doubt the merrier for this. Prosaic and uniform modern Justice, bewigged as well as blindfolded,

* Riley, 567; cf. Preface to "Liber Albus," p. cvii., and Walsingham, an. 1382.

† Cf. Mr. Walter Rye's articles in "Norf. Antq. Misc.," vol ii., p. 194, and *Archæological Review* for 1888, p. 201.

could no more have been foreseen by Chaucer than railways or life insurance. First of all, there was the chance of bribing the judge in the regular and acknowledged way of business.* Then, the prospect of a Royal pardon; Edward III. more than once proclaimed such a general amnesty; and a petition of the Commons in 1389, forthwith embodied in an Act of Parliament, is eloquent on the "outrageous mischiefs and damages which have befallen the Realm because treasons, murders, and rapes of women are too commonly perpetrated; and all the more so because charters of pardon have been too lightly granted in such cases." The terms of the petition and bill, and the heroic measures of remedy, are sufficiently significant of the state of things with which the reformers had to contend.†

Moreover, justice offered at every point a series of splendid uncertainties, and a thousand giddy turns of fortune's wheel. Apart from the practical impunity of the powerful, even the poorest felon had more chances in his favour than the modern plutocrat; for there is no higher prize than a man's own life, and no American millionaire enjoys facilities for homicide equal to those of our 14th-century villagers. Such regrettable incidents, as reckoned from the coroners' rolls, were from five to forty times more frequent then than in our days—it depends whether we count them as mere manslaughters or, according to the stricter idea of modern justice, as downright murders. No doubt stabbing was never so frequent or so systematic in England as at Naples; but thousands of worthy Englishmen might have cried with Chaucer's Host, "for I am perilous

* The complaints which meet us in Gower and "Piers Plowman" on this score are more than borne out by the "Shillingford Letters" (Camden Soc., 1871). The worthy Mayor of Exeter reports faithfully to his fellow-citizens what bribes he gives, and to whom.

† Chaucer's pupil Hoccleve speaks almost equally strongly on the mischief of such pardons ("Works," E.E.T.S., vol. iii., pp. 113 ff).

with knife in hand!" Many readers have doubtless noted how, in this very passage, Harry Bailey reckons as probable punishment for homicide not the gallows, but only outlawry—

> I wot well she will do me slay some day
> Some neighëbour, and thennë go my way. . . .

The fact is that judicial statistics of the Middle Ages show the murderer to have had many more chances of survival than a convicted thief. The Northumberland Roll of 1279 (to choose a typical instance) gives 72 homicides to only 43 accidental deaths. These 72 deaths were brought home to 83 culprits, of whom only 3 are recorded to have been hanged. Of the remainder, 69 escaped altogether, 6 took sanctuary, 2 were never identified, 1 pleaded his clergy, 1 was imprisoned, and 1 was fined. To a mind of any imagination, such bare facts will often open wider vistas than a great deal of so-called poetry. There can be no truer commentary on the "Tale of Gamelyn" or the "Geste of Robin Hood" than these formal assize rolls. The justice's clerk drones on monotonously, paragraph after paragraph, "Alan Fuller . . . and he fled, and therefore let him be outlawed; chattels he hath none"; "Patrick Scot . . . fled . . . outlawed"; "William Slater . . . fled . . . outlawed"; but all the while we see the broad sunshine outside the windows, and hear the rustle of the forest leaves, and voices whisper in our ear—

> He must needës walk in wood that may not walk in town.
> . . . . . .
> In summer, when the shaws be sheen,
> And leaves be large and long,
> It is full merry in fair forest
> To hear the fowlës' song.

CHAPTER XXIII

PRIESTS AND PEOPLE

"Charity is a childlike thing, as Holy Church witnesseth;
As proud of a penny as of a pound of gold,
And all so glad of a gown of grey russet
As of a coat of damask or of clean scarlet.
He is glad with all glad, as girls that laughen all,
And sorry when he seeth men sorry; as thou seest children . . .
Laugh when men laughen, and lower where men low'ren. . . .
And in a friar's frock he was found once,
But that is far and many years, in Francis' time;
In that suit since too seldom hath he been found."

"Piers Plowman," B., xvii., 296, 352

WHEN the greatest Pope of the 13th century saw in his dream a vision of St. Francis propping the tottering church, both he and the saint augured from this happy omen a reformation more sudden and complete than was actually possible. Church historians of all schools have often seemed to imply that if St. Francis had come back to earth on the first or second centenary of his death, he would have found the Church rather worse than better; and certainly Chaucer's contemporaries thought so. It is probable that in this they were mistaken; that the higher life was in fact unfolding no less surely in religion than in the State, but that men's impatience of evils which were only too obvious, and a restlessness bred by the rapid growth of new ideas, tempted them to despair too easily of their own age. The failure of the friars became a theme of common talk, as soon as enough time had gone by for the world to realize that Francis and Dominic had but done what man can do, and that there was as yet no visibly new heaven or new earth. Wycliffe himself scarcely inveighed

more strongly against many of the worst abuses in the Church than Bonaventura a century before him—Bonaventura, the canonized saint and Minister General of the Franciscans, who as a boy had actually seen the Founder face to face. The current of thought during those hundred years is typified by Dante and the author of "Piers Plowman." Dante, bitterly as he rebuked the corruptions of the age, still dreamed of reform on conservative lines. In "Piers Plowman" it is frankly recognized that things must be still worse before they can be better. The Church is there described as already succumbing to the assaults of Antichrist, aided by "proud priests more than a thousand"—

> 'By Mary!' quoth a cursed priest of the March of Ireland,
> 'I count no more conscience, if only I catch silver,
> Than I do to drink a draught of good ale!'
> And so said sixty of the same country,
> And shotten again with shot, many a sheaf of oaths,
> And broad hookèd arrows, '*God's heart!*' and '*God's nails!*'
> And had almost Unity and Holy Church adown.
> Conscience cried 'Help, clergy,* or else I fall
> Through imperfect priests and prelates of Holy Church.'
> Friars heard him cry, and camen him to help;
> But, for they knew not their craft, Conscience forsook them.

One friar, however, is admitted, Brother "Creep-into-Houses," but he turns out the worst traitor of all, benumbing Contrition by his false absolutions—

> Sloth saw that, and so did Pride,
> And came with a keen will Conscience to assail.
> Conscience cried oft, and bade Clergy help him,
> And also Contrition, for to keep the gate.
> 'He lieth and dreameth,' said Peace, 'and so do many other;
> The friar with his physic this folk hath enchanted,
> And plastered them so easily, they dread no sin.'
> 'By Christ!' quoth Conscience then, 'I will become a pilgrim,
> And walken as wide as all the world lasteth
> To seek Piers the Plowman;† that Pride may be destroyed,

* *Clergy* is of course here used in the common medieval sense of *learning;* it does not refer to any body of men.

† *I.e.* the type of perfect religion, "the Christ that is to be."

> And that friars have a finding,* that for need flatteren,
> And counterplead me, Conscience. Now, Kind me avenge
> And send me hap and heal, till I have Piers the Plowman.'
> And sith he cried after grace, till I gan awake.

So ends this dreamer on the Malvern Hills, and so thought many more good Christians of Chaucer's time. It would be tedious even to enumerate the orthodox authorities which testify to the deep corruption of popular religion in the 14th century. Two books of Gower's "Vox Clamantis" (or one-third of the whole work) are devoted to invectives against the Church of his time; and he goes over the same ground with equal minuteness in his "Mirour de l'Omme." The times are out of joint, he says, the light of faith grows dim; the clergy are mostly ignorant, quarrelsome, idle, and unchaste, and the prelates do not correct them because they themselves are no better. The average priests do the exact opposite of what Chaucer praises in his Poor Parson; they curse for tithes, and leave their sheep in the lurch to go mass-hunting into the great towns. If, again, they stay unwillingly in the villages, then instead of preaching and visiting they waste their own time and the patrimony of the poor in riot or debauchery; nay, the higher clergy even encourage vice among the people in order to gain money and influence for themselves. Their evil example among the multitude, and the contempt into which they bring their office among the better laity, are mainly responsible for the decay of society. Of monks and nuns and friars, Gower writes even more bitterly; the monks are frequently unchaste; nuns are sometimes debauched even by their own official visitors, and the friars seriously menace the purity of family life. In short, the reign of Antichrist seems to be at hand; if the world is to be mended we can only pray God to reform the clergy. Wycliffe himself wrote nothing

* Be "found" or provided for, so that they need no longer to live by begging and flattery.

more bitter than this; yet Gower was a whole horizon removed from anti-clericalism or heresy; he hated Lollardy, and chose to spend his last days among the canons of Southwark. Moreover, in the next generation, we have an equally scathing indictment of the Church from Gascoigne, another bitter anti-Wycliffite and the most distinguished Oxford Chancellor of his generation. St. Catherine of Siena, who knew Rome and Avignon only too well, is proportionately more vehement in her indignation. Moreover, the formal records of the Church itself bear out all the gravest charges in contemporary literature. The parish churches were very frequently reported as neglected, dirty, and ruinous; the very service books and most necessary ornaments as either dilapidated or lacking altogether; priests and people as grossly irreverent.* Wherever we find a visitation including laity and clerics alike, the clergy presented for unchastity are always numerous out of all proportion to the laity; sometimes more than ten times as numerous. Episcopal registers testify plainly to the difficulty of dealing with monastic decay and to the neglect of proper precautions against the intrusion of unworthy clerics into benefices. Many of the anti-Lollard Articles solemnly presented by the University of Oxford to the King in 1414 might have been drawn up by Wycliffe himself. These pillars of the Church pray Henry V., who was known to have religion so much at heart, to find some remedy for the sale of indulgences, the "undisciplined and unlearned crowd which daily pressed to take sacred orders";

* This was very commonly the case even in the greatest cathedrals: typical reports may be found in the easily accessible "York Fabric Rolls" (Surtees Soc.). With regard to Canterbury, a strange legend is current to the effect that Lord Badlesmere was executed in 1322 for his irreverent behaviour in that cathedral. Apart from the extraordinary inherent improbability of any such story, the execution of Lord Badlesmere is one of the best known events in the reign. He was hanged for joining the Earl of Lancaster in open rebellion against Edward, against whom he had fought at Boroughbridge.

the scandalous ease with which "illiterate, silly, and ignorant" candidates, even if rejected by the English authorities, could get ordained at the Roman court; the system which allowed monasteries to prey upon so many parishes; the pardoners' notorious frauds, the irreverence of the people at large, the embezzlement of hospital endowments, the debasement of moral standards by flattering friar-confessors, and lastly the numbers and practical impunity of fornicating monks, friars, and parish priests. As early as 1371, the Commons had petitioned Edward III. that, "whereas the Prelates and Ordinaries of Holy Church take money of clergy and laity in redemption of their sin from day to day, and from year to year, in that they keep their concubines openly . . . to the open scandal and evil example of the whole commonalty," this system of hush-money should now be put down by Royal authority; that the ordinary courts of justice should have cognizance of such cases; and that such beneficed clergy as still persisted in concubinage should be deprived of their livings.*

To comment fully on Chaucer's clerical characters in the light of other contemporary documents would be to write a whole volume of Church history; but no picture of that age could be even roughly complete without such a summary as I have just given. We must, of course, discount to some extent the language of indignation; but, to understand what it was that drew such bitter words from writers of such acknowledged gravity, we must try to transport ourselves, with our own common human feelings, into that strange and distant world. So much of the old framework of society was either ill-made or long since outworn; a new world was struggling to grow up freely amid the mass of dying conventions; the human

* Wilkins, iii., 360 ff; "Rot. Parl." ii., 313. I have given fuller details and references in the 8th of my "Medieval Studies," "Priests and People" (Simpkins, 1s.).

THE CLERGY-HOUSE AT ALFRISTON, SUSSEX, BEFORE ITS RECENT RESTORATION

(FOR PLAN AND SECTION SEE P. 97)

spirit was surging vehemently against its barriers; and much was swept boisterously away.

Think for a moment of the English boy as we know him; for in most essentials he was very much the same even five hundred years ago. At fifteen or sixteen (or even at an earlier age, if his family had sufficient influence) he might well receive a fat rectory or canonry. Before the Black Death, an enormous proportion of the livings in lay advowson were given to persons who were not in priest's orders, and often not in holy orders at all.* The Church theoretically forbade with the utmost severity this intrusion of mere boys into the best livings; but all through the Church the forbidden thing was done daily, and most shamelessly of all at the Papal court. A strong bishop in the 13th century might indeed fight against the practice, but with slender success. Giffard of Worcester, a powerful and obstinate prelate, attempted in 1282 to enforce the recent decree of the Ecumenical Council of Lyons, and declared the rectory of Campden vacant because the incumbent had refused for three years past to qualify himself by taking priest's orders. After four years of desperate litigation, during which the Pope twice intervened in a half-hearted and utterly ineffectual fashion, the Bishop was obliged to leave the case to the judgment of the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose court enjoyed a reputation for venality only second to that of Rome. Other bishops seem to have given up all serious attempts to enforce the decree of the Council of Lyons; Stapeldon of Exeter, for instance, permitted nearly three-quarters of the first presentations by laymen to be made to persons who were not in priest's orders; and he commonly enjoined, after institution, that the new rector should go forthwith and study at

* Taking eight test-periods, which cover four dioceses and a space of nearly forty-five years, I find that, before the Black Death, scarcely more than one-third of the livings in lay gift were presented to men in priest's orders—the exact proportion is 262 priests to 452 non-priests.

the University. To appreciate the full significance of this, we must remember that boys habitually went up to Oxford in those days at from thirteen to sixteen, and that the discipline there was of almost incredible laxity. The majority of students, after inscribing their names on the books of a master whose authority over them was almost nominal, went and lodged where they chose in the town. At the time when Chaucer might have gone to Oxford there were, perhaps, 3000 students; but (apart from the friaries and collegiate provision for a few monks) there were only five colleges, with accommodation in all for something less than eighty students. Only one of these was of stone; not one was yet built in that quadrangular form which, adopted in Chaucer's later days by New College, has since set the pattern for both Universities; and the discipline was as rudimentary as the architecture. A further number of students were accommodated in "Halls" or "Hostels." These had originally been ordinary private houses, rented by two or more students in common; and the Principal was simply an older student who made himself responsible for the rent. Not until thirty years after Chaucer's death was it enacted that the Principal must be a B.A. at least; and since we find that at Paris, where the same regulation was introduced about the same time, it was necessary even fifty years later to proceed against women who kept University halls, it is quite probable that the salutary statute was frequently broken at Oxford also. The government of these halls was entirely democratic, and only at a later period was it possible even to close the gates on the students at night. These boys "were in general perfectly free to roam about the streets up to the hour at which all respectable citizens were in the habit, if not actually compelled by the town statutes, of retiring to bed. They might spend their evenings in the tavern and drink as much as they please. Drunkenness is rarely

treated as a University offence at all. . . . The penalties which are denounced and inflicted even for grave outrages are seldom severe, and never of a specially schoolboy character." "It is necessary to assert emphatically that the religious education of a bygone Oxford, in so far as it ever had any existence, was an inheritance not from the Middle Ages but from the Reformation. In Catholic countries it was the product of the Counter-reformation. Until that time the Church provided as little professional education for the future priest as it did religious instruction for the ordinary layman."* The only religious education was that the student, like other citizens, was supposed to attend Mass regularly on Sundays and holy days, and might very likely know enough Latin to follow the service. But the want of proper grounding in Latin was always the weak point of these Universities; it is probable that at least half the scholars left Oxford without any degree whatever; and we have not only the general complaints of contemporaries, but actual records of examinations showing that quite a considerable proportion of the clergy could not decently construe the language of their own service-books.

How, indeed, should the ordinary idle man have learned anything to speak of, under so rudimentary a system of teaching and discipline? Gower asserts as strongly as Wycliffe that the beneficed clergy escaped from their parishes to the University as to a place of riot and self-indulgence. If Exeter was a typical diocese (and there seems no reason to the contrary) there must have been at any given time something like six hundred English rectors and vicars living at

* Rashdall, "Universities of Europe," ii., 613, 701. Merely to reckon the number of years theoretically required for the different degrees, and to argue from this to the solid education of the medieval priest (as has sometimes been done), is to ignore the mass of unimpeachable evidence collected by Dr. Rashdall. Only an extremely small fraction of the students took any theological degree whatever.

the Universities with the licence of their bishops; and the Registers show definite traces of others who took French leave. Here, then, was a society in which boys were herded together with men of middle or advanced age, and in which the seniors were often the least decorous.* No doubt the average boy escaped the company of those "chamberdekyns," of whom the Oxford authorities complained that "they sleep all day, and prowl by night about taverns and houses of ill fame and occasions of homicide"; no doubt it was only a small minority at Cambridge of whom men complained to Parliament that they scoured the country in gangs for purposes of robbery and blackmail. But the average man cared no more for learning then than now, and had far fewer opportunities of study. The athleticism which is the refuge of modern idleness was severely discouraged by the authorities, while the tavern was always open. The Bishop himself, by instituting this boy in his teens, had given his approval to the vicious system which gave the prizes of the Church to the rich and powerful, and left a heavy proportion of the parish work to be done by a lower class of hireling "chaplains." These latter (who, like Chaucer's Poor Parson, were mostly drawn from the peasant class) were willing to accept the lowest possible wages and the smallest possible chance of preferment for the sake of a position which, at the worst, put them far above their father or their brothers; and meanwhile the more fortunate rectors, little controlled either by their bishops or by public opinion, drifted naturally into the position of squarsons, hunters, and farmers. The large majority were precluded from almost all intellectual enjoyments by their imperfect education and the scarcity of books. The regular and healthy home life, which has kept so

* The list of indictments for grave offences in "Munim. Acad." (R.S.), vol. ii., contains a very large proportion of graduates, chaplains, and masters of Halls; and Gerson frequently speaks with bitter indignation of the number of Parisian scholars who were debauched by their masters.

many an idle man straight in the world, was denied to these men, who were professionally pledged to live as the angels of God, while they stood exposed to every worldly temptation. The consequence was inevitable; orthodox writers for centuries before the Reformation complained that the real fount and origin of heresy lay in the evil lives of the clergy. In outlying districts like Wales, probably also in Ireland, and certainly in parts of Germany, clerical concubinage was systematically tolerated, and only taxed for the benefit of the bishop's or archdeacon's purse. The reader has already seen that this same system was often practised in England, though with less cynical effrontery.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

"Although the style [of Chaucer] for the antiquity may distaste you, yet as under a bitter and rough rind there lieth a delicate kernel of conceit and sweet invention."—HENRY PEACHAM, "The Compleat Gentleman," 1622

INTO this state of things suddenly came the "Black Death" of 1348–9, the most terrible plague that ever raged in Christendom. This was at once hailed by moralists as God's long-delayed punishment upon a society rotten to the core. At first the world was startled into seriousness, Many of the clergy fought the plague with that self-sacrificing devotion which, in all denominations, a large fraction of the Christian clergy has always shown at similar moments. But there is no evidence to show that the priests died in sensibly larger proportions than their flocks; and many contemporary chroniclers expressly record that the sick were commonly deserted even by their spiritual pastors. After the first shock was over, the multitude relapsed into a licence proportionate to their first terror—a reaction described most vividly by Boccaccio, but with equal emphasis by other chroniclers. Many good men, in their bitter disappointment, complained that the world was grown more careless and irreligious than before the Plague; but this can hardly be the verdict of most modern students who look carefully into the mass of surviving evidence.

To begin with, the Black Death dealt a fatal blow to that old vicious system of boy-rectors. Half the population perished in the plague, half the livings went suddenly begging; and in the Church, as on the farm,

labour was at a sudden premium. Such curates as survived dropped naturally into the vacant rectories; and, side by side with Acts of Parliament designed to keep the labourer down to his old wages, we find archiepiscopal decrees against the "unbridled cupidity" of the clergy, who by their pernicious example encouraged this demand of the lower classes for higher wages. The incumbent, who ought to be only too thankful that God has spared his life, takes advantage of the present stress to desert his parish and run after Mass-money.* Chaplains, again, are "not content with their competent and accustomed salaries," which, as a matter of fact, were sometimes no higher than the wages of a common archer or a farm bailiff. But the economic movement was irresistible; and the Registers from this time forward show an extraordinary increase in the number of priests instituted to livings. In the same lists where the priests were formerly only thirty-seven per cent. of the whole, their proportion rises during and after the Pestilence to seventy-four per cent. The Black Death did in one year what the Ecumenical Council of Lyons had conspicuously failed to do, though summoned by a great reforming Pope and inspired by such zealous disciplinarians as St. Bonaventura and his fellow-Franciscan, Eudes Rigaud of Rouen.

Again, the shock of the Pestilence, the complete desertion of so many poor country benefices by the clergy, and the scandal generated by this quarrel over wages between chaplains and their employers, naturally threw the people back very much upon their own religious resources. The lay control over parish

* In Chaucer's words—

> He set . . . his benefice to hire
> And left his sheep encumbred in the mire,
> And ran to London, unto Saintë Paul's
> To seeken him a chanterie for souls.

The Archbishop's decree may be found in the "Register of Bp. de Salopia," p. 639; cf. 694 (Somerset Record Society).

finances in 15th-century England, which, limited as it was, still excites the wonder of modern Catholicism, probably dated from this period. Men no longer gave much to monks, or even (in comparison with past times) to friars; but they now devoted their main religious energies to beautifying and endowing their own parish churches, which became far larger and more richly furnished in the 15th century than in the 13th. Moreover, Abbot Gasquet is probably right in attributing to the Black Death the rise of a new tone in orthodox religious feeling, which "was characterized by a [more] devotional and more self-reflective cast than previously." There was every probability of such a religious change; all earnest men had seen in the plague the chastening hand of God; and in the end it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which were exercised thereby.

But this bracing process could not possibly, under the circumstances of the time, work entirely on the lines of orthodox conservatism. When we count up the forces that produced Wycliffism—the notorious corruption of the papal court, its unpopular French leanings, the vast sums drawn from England by foreign ecclesiastics, the unpopularity of the clergy at home, the growth of the English language and national spirit—among all these causes we must not forget to note that Wycliffe and his contemporaries, in their early manhood, had struggled through a year of horrors almost beyond modern conception. They had seen the multitude run wild, first with religious fanaticism and then with blasphemous despair; had watched all this volcanic matter cool rapidly down into dead lava; and were left to count one more abortive reform, and re-echo the old despairing "How long, O Lord!" "Sad to say, it seemeth to many that we are fallen into those unhappy times wherein the lights of heaven seem to be turned to darkness, and the stars of heaven are fallen upon the earth. . . . Our priests are now become blind, dark, and

beclouded . . . they are now darker than the laity. . . . Lo, in these days there is neither shaven crown on their head, nor religious decency in their garments, nor modesty in their words, nor temperance in their food, nor shamefastness in their gestures, nor even chastity in their deeds."* Such is the cry of an orthodox contemporary of Wycliffe's; and words like these explain why Wycliffe himself became unorthodox against his will. If he had died at the age of fifty or thereabouts, towards the beginning of Chaucer's business career, posterity would have known him only as the most distinguished English philosopher of his time. The part which he played in later life was to a great extent forced upon him by the strong practical sense which underlay his speculative genius. Others saw the faults of religion as clearly, and exposed them as unmercifully, as he. But, while they were content to end with a pious "Well, God mend all!" Wycliffe was one of those in whom such thoughts lead to action: "Nay, by God, Donald, we must help Him to mend it!" No doubt there were errors in his teaching, and much more that was premature; otherwise the authorities could never have managed so nearly to exterminate Lollardy. On the other hand, it is equally certain that Wycliffe gave a voice to feelings widespread and deeply rooted in the country. Orthodox chroniclers record their amazement at the rapid spread of his doctrines. "In those days," says Knighton, with picturesque exaggeration, "that sect was held in the greatest honour, and multiplied so that you could scarce meet two men by the way whereof one was not a disciple of Wycliffe." Walsingham speaks of the London citizens in general as "unbelieving towards God and the traditions of their fathers, supporters of the Lollards."† In 1395 the Wycliffite opinions were

* Quoted from a MS. collection of 14th-century sermons by Ch. Petit-Dutaillis in "Etudes Dédiées à G. Monod.," p. 385.

† Knighton (R.S.), ii., 191; at still greater length on p. 183. Walsingham, ann. 1387, 1392; cf. "Eulog. Hist.," iii., 351, 355.

openly pleaded before Parliament by two privy councillors, a powerful Northamptonshire landlord, and the brother of the Earl of Salisbury; the bishops had to recall Richard II. in hot haste from Ireland to deal with this open propaganda of heresy. Ten years after Chaucer's death, again, a Bill was presented by the Commons for the wholesale disendowment of bishoprics and greater monasteries, "because of priests and clerks that now have full nigh destroyed all the houses of alms within the realm." The petitioners pleaded that, apart from the enormous gain to the finances of the State, and to a proposed new system of almshouses, it would be a positive advantage to disendow idle and luxurious prelates and monks, "the which life and evil example of them hath been so long vicious that all the common people, both lords and simple commons, be now so vicious and infected through boldship of their sin, that scarce any man dreadeth God nor the Devil." The King and the Prince of Wales, however, would not listen either to this proposal or to those upon which the petitioners afterwards fell back, that criminous clerks should be dealt with by the King's courts, and that the recent Act for burning Lollards should be repealed.*

The Lollard movement in the Parliament of 1395 was led by Chaucer's old fellow-ambassador, Sir Richard Stury, the "valiant ancient knight" of Froissart's chronicles; and Chaucer himself has often been hailed, however falsely, as a Wycliffite. The mere fact that he speaks disparagingly of the clergy simply places him side by side with St. Bernard, St. Bonaventura, and St. Catherine of Siena, whose language on this subject is sometimes far stronger than his. As a fellow-protégé of John of Gaunt, Chaucer must often have met Wycliffe in that princely household; he sympathized, as so many educated Englishmen did, with many of the reformer's

* Kingsford, "Chronicles of London," p. 64; Walsingham, an. 1410.

opinions; but all the evidence is against his having belonged in any sense to the Lollard sect. The testimony of the poet's own writings has been excellently summed up in Chap. VI. of Professor Lounsbury's "Studies in Chaucer." In early life our hero seems to have accepted as a matter of course the popular religion of his time. His hymn to the Virgin even outbids the fervour of its French original; and in the tales of miracles which he versified he has taken no pains to soften down touches which would now be received with scepticism alike by Protestants and by the papal commissioners for the revision of the Breviary. (Tales of the "Second Nun," "Man of Law," and "Prioress.") Even then he was probably among the many who disbelieved in tales of Jewish ritual murder, though not sufficiently to deter the artist in him from welcoming the exquisite pathos of the little scholar's death. But his mind was naturally critical; and it was further widened by an acquaintance with many cities and many men. The merchants and scholars of Italy were notorious for their free-thinking; and we may see in the unpriestly priest Froissart the sceptical habit of mind which was engendered in a 14th-century "intellectual" by a life spent in courts and among men of the world. It is quite natural, therefore, to find Chaucer scoffing openly at several small superstitions, which in many less sceptical minds lived on for centuries—the belief in Arthur and Lancelot, in fairies, in magic, in Virgilian miracles, in pagan oracles and gods, in alchemy, and even in judicial astrology. These last two points, indeed, supply a very close analogy to his religious views. It is difficult to avoid concluding from his very intimate acquaintance with the details of the pursuit, that he had himself once been bitten with the craze for the philosopher's stone. Again, if we only looked at his frequent poetical allusions to judicial astrology, we should be driven to conclude that he was a firm believer in the superstition; but in the prose

"Astrolabe," one of his latest and most serious writings, he expressly repudiates any such belief.

The analogy from this to his expressions on religious subjects is very close. At first sight we might judge him to have accepted to the last, though with growing reserve and waning enthusiasm, the whole contemporary system of doctrines and practices which Wycliffe in later life so unreservedly condemned. But one or two passages offer startling proof to the contrary. Take the Prologue to the "Legend of Good Women"—

> A thousand timës have I heard men tell
> That there is joy in heaven and pain in hell,
> And I accordë well that it is so.
> But natheless yet wot I well also
> That there is none dwelling in this countree
> That either hath in heaven or hell y-be,
> He may of it none other wayës witen [know
> But as he hath heard said or found it written,
> For by assay there may no man it prove.

And, again, the reflections which he adds upon the death of Arcite, without the least authority from the original of Boccaccio—

> His spirit changèd house, and wentë there,
> As I came never, I can not tell where:
> Therefore I stint, I am no divinister; [stop
> Of soulës find I not in this register,
> Nor list me those opinions to tell
> Of them, though that they writen where they dwell.

It is difficult to believe that the man who gratuitously recorded those two personal impressions, without the least excuse of artistic necessity, was a perfectly orthodox Catholic. It is more than possible that he would not have accepted in cold blood all the consequences of his words; but we may see plainly in him that sceptical, mocking spirit to which the contemporary Sacchetti constantly addresses himself in his sermons. This was indeed one of the most obvious results of the growing unpopularity of the hierarchy, intensified by the shock of the Black Death. That

great crisis had specially stimulated the two religious extremes. Churches grew rapidly in size and in splendour of furniture, while great lords built themselves oratories from which they could hear Mass without getting out of bed. The Pope decreed a new service for a new Saint's Day, "full of mysteries, stuffed with indulgences," at a time when even reasonable men began to complain that the world had too many. Richard II. presented his Holiness with an elaborate "Book of the Miracles of Edward late King of England"—that is, of the weak and vicious Edward II., whose attempted canonization was as much a political job as those of Lancaster and Arundel, Scrope and Henry VI.; and this popular canonization ran so wild that men feared lest the crowd of new saintlings should throw Christ and His Apostles into the shade. On the other side there was the "new theology," which had grown up, with however little justification, from the impulse given by orthodox and enthusiastic friars—pantheistic doctrines, minimizing the reality of sin; denials of eternal punishment; attempts to find a heaven for good pagans and Jews.* Even in the 13th century,

* "P. Plowman," B., xv., 383: Jusserand, "Epop. Myst.," p. 217. See especially the remarkable words of Chaucer's contemporary, the banker Rulman Merswin of Strassburg, quoted by C. Schmidt, "Johannes Tauler," p. 218. After setting forth his conviction that Christendom is now (1351) in a worse state than it has been for many hundred years past, and that evil Christians stand less in God's love than good Jews or heathens who know nothing better than the faith in which they were born, and would accept a better creed if they could see it, Merswin then proceeds to reconcile this with the Catholic doctrine that none can be saved without baptism. "I will tell thee; this cometh to pass in manifold hidden ways unknown to the most part of Christendom in these days; but I will tell thee of one way. . . . When one of these good heathens or Jews draweth near to his end, then cometh God to his help and enlighteneth him so far in Christian faith, that with all his heart he desireth baptism. Then, even though there be no present baptism for him, yet from the bottom of his heart he yearneth for it: so I tell thee how God doth: He goeth and baptiseth him in the baptism of his good yearning will and his painful death. Know therefore that many of these good heathens and Jews are in the life eternal, who all came thither in this wise."

willingly or unwillingly, the friars had raised similar questions; a Minister-General had been scandalized to hear them debating in their schools "whether God existed"; and Berthold of Ratisbon had felt bound to warn his hearers against the subtle sophism that souls, when once they have been thoroughly calcined, must reach a point at which anything short of hell-fire would feel uncomfortably chilly. This is the state of mind into which Chaucer, like so many of his contemporaries, seems to have drifted. He had no reasoned antagonism to the Church dogmas as a whole; on the contrary, he was keenly sensible to the beauty of much that was taught. But the humourist in him was no less tickled by many popular absurdities; and he had enough philosophy to enjoy the eternal dispute between free-will and predestination. As a boy, he had knelt unthinkingly; as a broken old man, he was equally ready to bow again before Eternal Omnipotence, and to weep bitterly for his sins. But, in his years of ripe experience and prosperity and conscious intellectual power, we must think of him neither among the devout haunters of shrines and sanctuaries nor among those who sat more austerely at the feet of Wycliffe's Poor Priests; rather among the rich and powerful folk who scandalized both Catholics and Lollards by taking God's name in vain among their cups, and whetting their worldly wit on sacred mysteries. We get glimpses of this in many quarters—in the "Roman de la Rose," for instance, but still more in Sacchetti's sermons and the poem of "Piers Plowman." Here the poet complains, after speaking of the "gluttony and great oaths" that were then fashionable—

"But if they carpen of Christ, these clerks and these layfolk [discuss
At the meat in their mirth, when minstrels be still,
Then tell they of the Trinity a tale or twain
And bringen forth a bald reason, and take Bernard to witness,
And put forth a presumption to prove the sooth.
Thus they drivel at their dais the Deity to know,
And gnawen God with the gorge when the gut is full . . .

I have heard high men eating at the table
Carpen, as they clerkës were, of Christ and His might
And laid faults upon the Father that formed us all,
And carpen against clerkës crabbed words :—
'Why would our Saviour suffer such a worm in His bliss
That beguiled the Woman and the Man after,
Through which wiles and words they wenten to hell,
And all their seed for their sin the same death suffered?
Here lieth your lore,' these lords 'gin dispute.
'Of that ye clerks us kenneth of Christ by the Gospel . . . [teach
Why should we, that now be, for the works of Adam
Rot and be rent? reason would it never . . .'
Such motives they move, these masters in their glory,
And maken men to misbelieve that muse much on their words."*

More unorthodox still were those whom Walsingham would have made partly responsible for the horrors of the Peasants' Revolt. "Some traced the cause of these evils to the sins of the great folk, whose faith in God was feigned; for some of them (it is said) believed that there was no God, no sacrament of the altar, no resurrection from the dead, but that as a beast dies so also there is an end of man."

There is, of course, no such dogmatic infidelity in Chaucer. Even if he had felt it, he was too wise to put it in writing; as Professor Lounsbury justly says of the two passages quoted above, "the wonder is not that they are found so infrequently, but that they are found at all." Yet there was also in Chaucer a true vein of religious seriousness. "Troilus and Criseyde" was written not long before the "Legend of Good Women"; and as at the outset of the later poem he goes out of his way to scoff, so at the end of the "Troilus" he is at equal pains to make a profession of faith. The last stanza of all, with its invocation to the Trinity and to the Virgin Mary, might be merely conventional; medieval literature can show similar sentiments in very strange contexts, and part of this very stanza is translated from Dante. But however

* "P. Plowman," B., x., p. 51; cf. Langlois, *l. c.*, pp. 211, 264–5.

Chaucer may have loved to let his wit play about sacred subjects "at meat in his mirth when minstrels were still," we can scarcely fail to recognize another side to his mind when we come to the end of those "Troilus" stanzas which are due merely to Boccaccio, and begin upon the translator's own epilogue—

> O youngë freshë folkës, he or she
> In which ay love up-groweth with your age,
> Repair ye home from worldly vanitee . . .

"Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for the play is played out." But, though we have nothing of the reformer in our composition! though we are for the most part only too frankly content to take the world as we find it; though, even in their faith, our fellow-Christians make us murmur "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" though we most love to write of Vanity Fair, yet at the bottom of our heart we do desire a better country, and confess sometimes with our mouth that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Indeed, if our poet had not been keenly sensible of the beauty of holiness, then the less Chaucer he. As it is, he stands the most Shakespearian figure in English literature, after Shakespeare himself. Age cannot wither him, nor custom stale his infinite variety. We venerate him for his years, and he daily startles us with the eternal freshness of his youth. All springtide is here, with its green leaves and singing-birds; aptly we read him stretched at length in the summer shade, yet almost more delightfully in winter, with our feet on the fender; for he smacks of all familiar comforts—old friends, old books, old wine, and even, by a proleptic miracle, old cigars. "Here," said Dryden, "is God's plenty;" and Lowell inscribed the first leaf of his Chaucer with that promise which the poet himself set upon the enchanted gate of his "Parliament of Fowls"—

Through me men go into the blissful place
Of the heart's heal and deadly woundës' cure;
Through me men go unto the well of Grace,
Where green and lusty May doth ever endure;
This is the way to all good aventure;
Be glad, thou Reader, and thy sorrow off-cast
All open am I, pass in, and speed thee fast!

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